

# Bandwagon

The Journal of the Circus Historical Society

Vol. 64 No. 1 2020



## From the Editor

This year marks the centennial of the ratification of the Nineteenth Amendment to the United States Constitution. With that landmark revision to the supreme law of the land, American women gained the right to vote. The Amendment went into effect on August 26, 1920 following a decades-long suffrage movement that touched nearly every strand of American society. Some may be surprised to learn that this far-ranging and lengthy campaign included circus women. In this issue of *Bandwagon*, Kat Vecchio tells the story of some of those women who contributed to the cause that would eventually enfranchise equestriennes and trapeze ladies just as it did the other women of the land.

Of course, we are observing another periodic constitutional event in 2020 – the presidential election in November. No matter what your political leaning may be, you will find fascination in Chris Berry's revelations and extensive new information about the circus and the American presidency. Chris's work is truly a momentous treatise on this subject.

A short article in this issue covers the first successful giraffe breeding program in the United States – one that happened to be located at Barnum & Bailey's circus winter quarters in Bridgeport, Connecticut. A second article written by the editor examines the record and discloses new information concerning President Washington's attendance at the country's first circus. Another feature shares pasteboard season tickets that once permitted VIPs and visiting showmen to freely attend big top and wild west performances – each of these from the extensive collection of tickets and passes at Circus World Museum in Baraboo. Finally, there is an analysis of an early menagerie lease authored by Pete Shrake that provides insight on what such traveling zoological companies were like all those years ago.

May you find joy and knowledge within these pages that help to bring circus history to life. On with the show!

## Retiring Trustees

Four members concluded their terms on the Circus Historical Society Board of Trustees at the end of 2019. All of us associated with CHS and *Bandwagon* are deeply grateful to Bob Cline, Steve Flint, Steve Gossard and Pete Shrake for their stupendous and highly valued service to our organization. Three rings of thanks and appreciation to each of them.

## Errata

A recent issue of *Bandwagon* (Vol. 63, No.3, 2019) included an article featuring Charles Cushman's color photographs of Ringling Bros. and Barnum & Bailey. The top image on page 65 incorrectly identified one of the members of the Flying Concellos posing on the Chicago lot in 1949. The man on the right in the picture was the catcher, Jimmy Crocker, not Art Concello who was no longer flying at that time. We greatly appreciate Dorita Estes and Maureen Brunsdale making us aware of this error.

## Circus Historical Society

[circushistory.org](http://circushistory.org)

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*"To preserve, promote, and share through education the history and cultural significance of the circus and allied arts, past and present."*

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# Bandwagon

The Journal of the Circus Historical Society  
2020 Volume 64, Number 1

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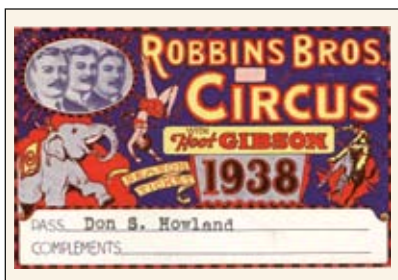
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## Website and Back Issues

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## About the covers *by Greg Parkinson*



*The inscription on this studio photograph reads, "With best wishes to Victoria Davenport from Victoria Codona, New York April 9, 1911."*

*Greg Parkinson collection with thanks to Fred D. Pfening III*

There has long been widespread admiration for the "Princess Victoria" poster on our cover. A century ago, it advertised upcoming dates for the Sells-Floto Circus. The radiantly beautiful wire dancer was Victoria Codona who came to the United States in the spring of 1909 to perform on Barnum & Bailey. When Strobridge Litho. Co. issued this poster ten years later, 28-year-old Victoria was already nearing the end of her circus career.

The single-figure composition of the poster was cer-

tainly an eye-catching design. In addition to the square-on perspective and the arresting beauty of the woman, the artwork has a commanding focal point generated by the intersecting lines of Miss Victoria's outstretched arms and her elegant posture extending along a vertical axis. Reinforcing this subconscious focus are the slanting contours of the black and white bodice of her cascading mille feuille dress. The assorted red fabrics of her attire and the swirling chiffon scarf add to the poster's appeal.

Although each of the six Codona children was born in Mexico, they had no Mexican heritage. Three of their grandparents were French and one was from Scotland of mixed European descent. This helps to explain Victoria's blue eyes and auburn hair.<sup>1</sup> Her father, Eduardo Codona, and mother, Hortense Buisley, were both from well-established families of circus performers. Together they operated the Gran Circo Codona. Victoria, Alfredo and Abelardo ("Lalo") were the three oldest Codona children. They debuted in the family show in 1897, and over the following decade they became accomplished performers.

In early 1909, agent Ernie Thompson enthusiastically contacted his clients in Baraboo about a young woman he had seen dancing on the silver strand in Mexico. Almost immediately, Eduardo received a telegram from Otto Ringling offering "\$125 per week and board and transportation..." for Victoria to join Barnum & Bailey.<sup>2</sup>

Victoria performed her incomparable tight-wire act about ten feet above the center ring sawdust. Press accounts christened her as, "the prettiest girl of the circus."<sup>3</sup> At the end of her routine,

the thin cable was gradually slackened as she laterally swung in ever-increasing arcs.<sup>4</sup>

Alfredo, who offered a daring single trapeze act, joined his older sister in entertaining American audiences touring for four seasons with Barnum & Bailey. Alfredo's act included catching the swinging trapeze bar by his toes and heels. "One of his most effective tricks is a back balance across the trapeze without the support of his hands, and a sudden slip to a heel catch."<sup>5</sup>



*As a young girl, Ruth Farris joined Ed Mylett and Eugenie Alphonse whose large group of flyers comprised the Silbon Troupe. Alfredo and Ruth performed together in the Codona flying act on Wirth Bros. Circus 1913-1915. Ruth later took the name of her second husband, Ira Millette.*

Circus World Museum

In February 1913, the young Codonas, along with their father and two other circus families, departed for Australia where they began two seasons with the Wirth Bros. railroad circus. Victoria performed her tight-wire act, and the Flying Codonas made their debut. The flying act included Alfredo, Lalo, Steve Outch and Ruth Farris. After the “down under” tour, the Codonas returned to the States to fulfill contracts for fair dates. It was during one of these engagements that Victoria met race car driver William Adolph. Their romance soon led to a wedding in El Paso, Texas in November 1914. The next year, the Flying Codonas returned to Australia. Victoria stayed closer to home and performed in North America.

In 1916 and 1917, Alfredo and Lalo returned to Barnum & Bailey, joining the large Siegrist-Silbon flying troupe. At the end of 1917, the brothers reformed their own flying act, recruiting Clara Curtin Groves from the Siegrist-Silbons. During 1918, the Codonas including Victoria reunited their acts and played indoor engagements and fair dates.

The winter of 1918-1919 found the Codonas performing



*Codona brothers Lalo and Alfredo (center) and Clara Curtin Groves were photographed in 1920 when they appeared with Sells-Floto Circus. Alfredo had married Clara in Havana, Cuba in 1917.*

Circus World Museum

with Santos y Artigas in Cuba. While there, they received a telegram offering Victoria a contract to join the new Ringling “super circus” that would debut in New York in March 1919. She had to decline, however, because all of the Codonas had already signed to appear with Sells-Floto.

The Strobridge lithograph on our back cover was also created for Sells-Floto, but in 1921. This poster accurately portrayed Alfredo’s aerial proficiencies, but was inaccurate in the spelling of the family name. It was used for only one season. The prior year in the spring of 1920, Sells-Floto opened at the Coliseum in Chicago. There on April 3, Codona first publicly performed the triple somersault.

All of the Codonas left Sells-Floto in June 1919 to honor other contracts that had committed them to the fair circuit for the balance of the year. The following June while again touring with Sells-Floto, Victoria received word that her husband was seriously ill. She obtained permission to leave the show to join him. Toward the end of 1920, Victoria went to Brazil and reunited with her brothers who were appearing there that winter. Those performances and some spot dates over the next few years marked the end of Victoria’s 27-year circus career.<sup>6</sup> Alfredo Codona’s legendary flying career was only beginning. **Bw**

## Endnotes

1. Victoria Codona Adolph interviews conducted in February 1979 by Marilyn Parkinson in Palm Springs, California.
2. “Telegrama” from Otto Ringling to Eduarde [sic] Codona, February 13, 1909, photocopy in Greg Parkinson collection.
3. *The Eau Clair Leader* (Wisconsin), June 27, 1911, p. 6.
4. *New York Clipper*, April 10, 1909, p. 236.
5. “Acts with the Barnum & Bailey Show,” *New York Clipper*, April 2, 1910.
6. For a more complete review of Victoria Codona’s circus career see Greg Parkinson, “Poster Princess – Victoria Codona,” *Bandwagon*, July-August 1980, pp. 11-14.



# 2020 Circus Historical Society Convention

**Due to the risks surrounding coronavirus, the 2020 CHS convention has been cancelled.**

**It will be rescheduled in the Bridgeport area in 2021.**

*Circus Smirkus on a sunny New England day*

The Circus Historical Society will hold its 2020 annual convention July 26-29 at the Trumbull Marriott near Bridgeport, Connecticut. Situated about five miles from the historic Barnum Museum and 50 miles from New York City, the Trumbull Marriott will be the perfect venue for circus historians to meet and explore the rich circus history of New England and New York City. The hotel is located at the intersection of the Merritt Parkway and Connecticut Route 8. It is easily accessible by automobile from Interstates 95, 84 and 91 and by shuttle bus from each of the New York City-area airports. The hotel can also be reached by rail via Amtrak and Metro-North Railroad. The hotel provides free shuttle service to both the Bridgeport and Stratford railroad stations.

## Convention Program

The convention will officially begin on Sunday evening July 26 with a Gala Opening Reception in the Marriott's party tent. The reception will include a sumptuous buffet, cash bar and plenty of music and live entertainment. The Convention Registration Desk and Sales Room will be open on Sunday afternoon before the reception.

Monday will be filled with several fascinating presentations from leading circus historians. The day will end with the CHS Annual Banquet featuring Troy Wunderle as the keynote speaker. Wunderle is Artistic Director of Circus Smirkus. He is a graduate of the Maryland Institute College of Art and Ringling Brothers and Barnum & Bailey Clown College. He spent six years as Director of Clowning for the Ringling Brothers and Barnum & Bailey Circus and is a juried artist through the Vermont State Arts Council. For the

past 24 years, Wunderle has toured throughout the United States as a freelance performer and employee of Circus Smirkus. His antics have been featured on the Disney channel, The Today Show, Martha Stewart, Chronicle, Fetch, Fox and Friends and America's Funniest Home Videos.

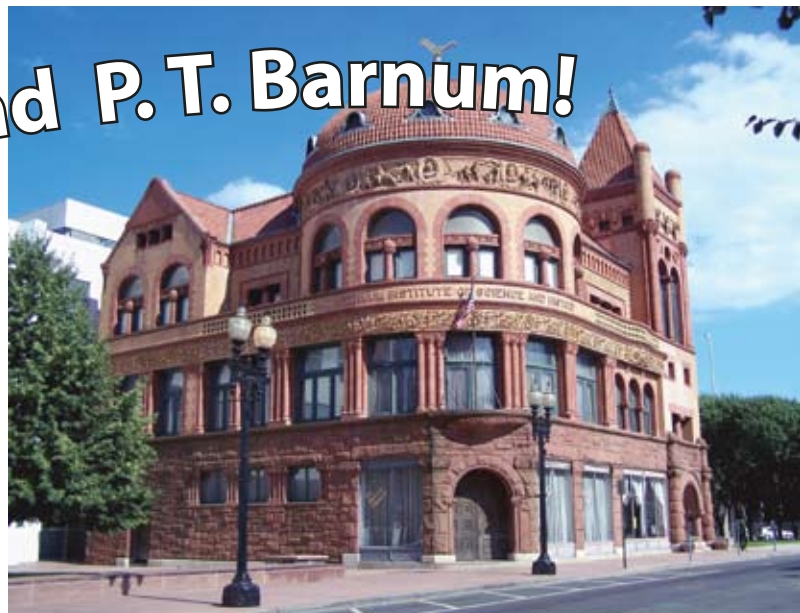
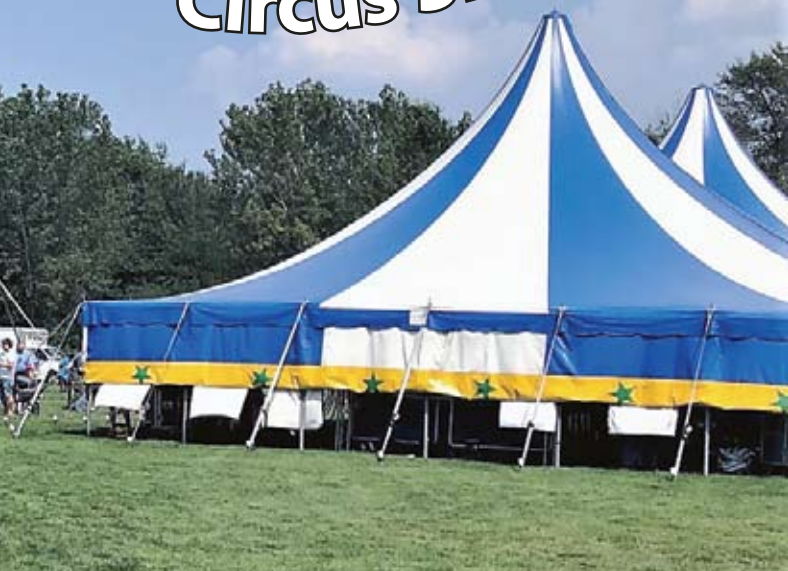
On Tuesday, conventioners will "meet" Mr. Barnum and learn about the circus history of Bridgeport, Connecticut. The day will begin with presentations about P. T. Barnum, Tom Thumb, the Barnum Museum, the Barnum & Bailey winter quarters and other nearby historic circus sites.

After lunch, the group will visit downtown Bridgeport to take a "hard hat" tour of the famous Barnum Museum, which is currently undergoing renovations. The group will also have an opportunity to visit the circus artifacts collection at the Bridgeport History Center which is two blocks



*Troy Wunderle, Circus Smirkus Artistic Director*

# Circus Smirkus and P.T. Barnum!



*The Barnum Museum in Bridgeport, Connecticut*

these and other New England and New York City area circus historical attractions will be posted on the CHS website.

## Hotel Reservations & Convention Registration

CHS members will receive a reduced room rate of only \$125 per night (plus taxes) at the Trumbull Marriott. That rate includes free parking and breakfast for two. Since some people may want to arrive earlier or stay later, the Trumbull Marriott will honor that rate for three days before July 26 and for three days after July 28. In order to take advantage of the discounted convention rate, please make your hotel reservation as soon as possible by calling 203-378-1400. Ask for the Circus Historical Society rate. **The CHS room rate block will close on June 26, 2020.**

The “early bird” convention Registration Fee for CHS members and their spouse/guest is \$180 each. The non-member Registration Fee, which includes a new CHS membership, is \$240 per person. The Registration Fee for full-time students is \$100. There will be an additional Late Fee of \$25 for all registrations received after June 1, 2020 and before July 26, 2020. There will be a \$50 Late Fee for all on-site registrations. Tickets to Circus Smirkus are priced at \$20 each. The round trip bus fare to Circus Smirkus is \$25 each.

Please register either online by going to the CHS website at [www.circushistory.org/](http://www.circushistory.org/) or by mail by using the enclosed registration form. **Remember to register before June 1, 2020 to save \$25 on your registration fee!**

To help the Convention Committee plan the transportation aspects of “field trips,” please indicate on your registration if you will have a vehicle at the convention, and if you will be able to provide rides to other conventioners to the Bridgeport sites on Tuesday July 28 and/or to Circus Smirkus in Simsbury on Wednesday July 29. Total mileage for the Tuesday excursions will be about 15 miles. Round trip to Simsbury on Wednesday will be about 120 miles. **BW**

from the museum.

The CHS group will then drive to nearby Mountain Grove Cemetery to see P. T. Barnum and Tom Thumb’s grave sites. Next up will be a “windshield tour” of beautiful Seaside Park, one of Barnum’s many generous gifts to the city. The drive will include a view of the impressive Barnum memorial statue which overlooks Long Island Sound.

Next, the group will pass by Wendt Field where the Barnum & Bailey winter quarters was located for almost 50 years. After the Bridgeport field trip, convention registrants will return to the Trumbull Marriott for the traditional CHS auction of historic circus posters, books, artifacts and other circus-related memorabilia.

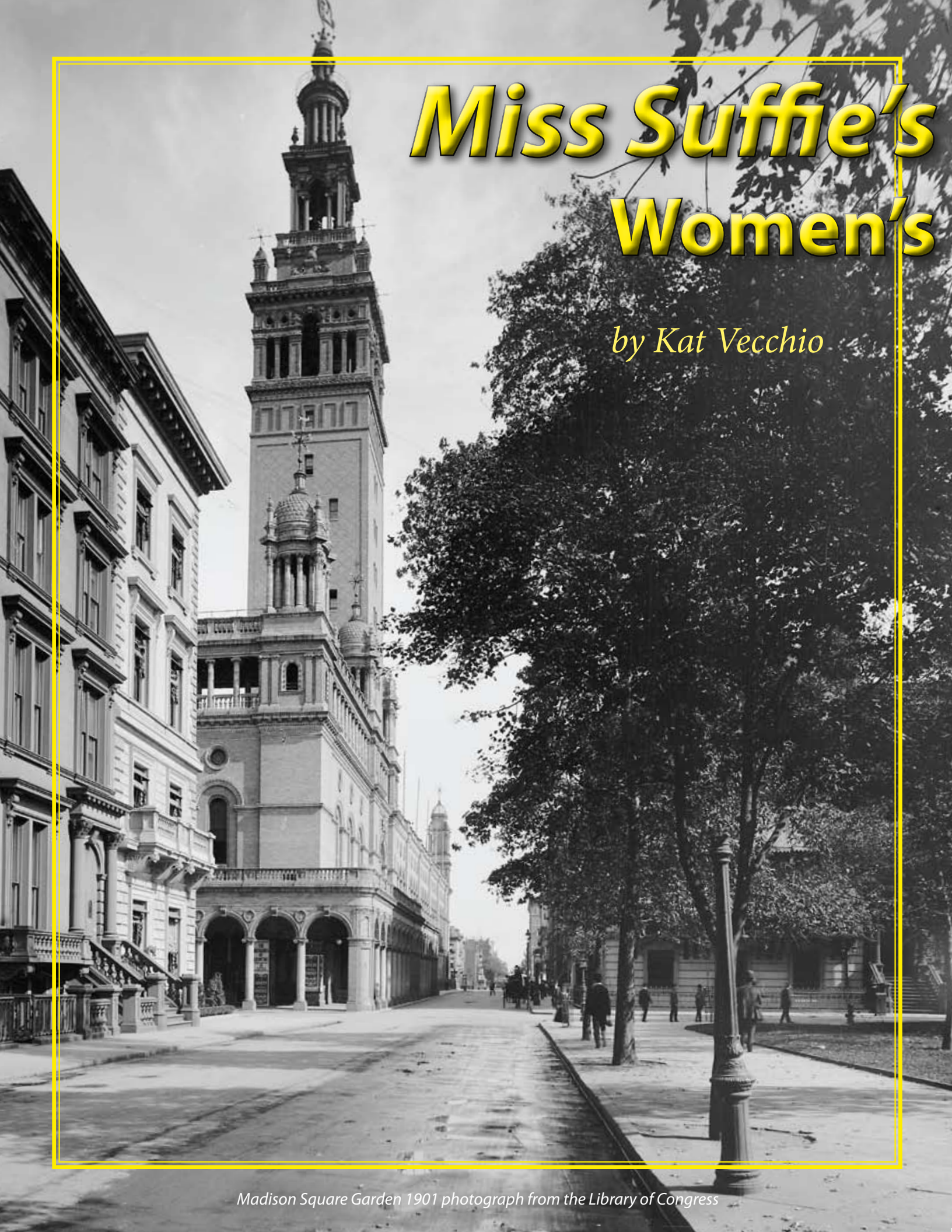
Wednesday will be circus day at the CHS convention. The group will travel about 60 miles to the Simsbury, Connecticut Performing Arts Center to spend the day with Circus Smirkus. Since 1987, Circus Smirkus has been bringing the transforming power of the circus arts to people of all ages. Performing under a colorful big top, this award-winning circus company consists of some 80 people including teenage performers, professional circus coaches, tent and technical crew and a live circus band performing an original score. CHS members will visit with the performers and crew while on the lot and attend the afternoon performance.

Although the official convention program will end with the circus performance, conventioners will have an opportunity to travel on their own to nearby Hartford, Connecticut to visit the site of the 1944 Ringling Bros. and Barnum & Bailey big top fire. Other nearby circus-related attractions include the Beinecke Rare Book Library and Peabody Museum at Yale University in New Haven and the Historic Elephant Hotel in Somers, New York. Further details about



# *Miss Suffie's Women's*

*by Kat Vecchio*



*Madison Square Garden 1901 photograph from the Library of Congress*



# Debut: Circus and the Suffrage Movement

It should have been a quiet day in the Barnum & Bailey animal menagerie. The 1912 season had opened on March 21 at New York City's Madison Square Garden, then located on 26<sup>th</sup> Street across from Madison Square Park. This Sunday afternoon, just over a week later, was a day off for performers and animals alike. But slowly a group of female performers began to assemble in the large open room. Chairs were placed next to the giraffe pen that held Mary and Mike and their new baby. Lions, a Bengalese tiger, "a two-horned rhinoceros, ostriches, yaks, pigs, seals, cassowaries, flamingos, monkeys" and a hippopotamus named Babe peered out from their brightly painted wagons that ringed the room.<sup>1</sup> The unique audience of animals were also joined by a few pressmen, all of them looking on with curiosity. The women were not meeting to talk about circus business or the upcoming season, but instead to learn about suffrage.

They had been brought together by acrobat Zella Florence, and Josephine DeMott Robinson, a retired circus bareback rider. Among the women present was petite May Wirth, whose equestrienne act included a running leap onto the back of a moving horse; Victoria Codona, whose beauty was nearly as famous as her skill on the high wire; bareback riders Victoria Davenport and Lillian Seabert; the "female Hercules" Katie Sandwina; and many others.<sup>2</sup>

It was a promising turnout of circus women, but notably absent were the top representatives from the Women's Political Union, a suffrage organization known for its focus on working women. Inez Millholland, a rising star in the women's suffrage movement, had been expected to attend the meeting. She had been quoted in the *New York Press* saying that, "circus women exemplify one phase of the ability of women to earn their own living."<sup>3</sup> And even though she'd said she was interested in helping them join the fight for suffrage, at the last minute, Millholland backed out. It is possible her last minute cancelation was out of concern that the meeting was nothing but a circus publicity ploy.<sup>4</sup>

Such skepticism would not have been unfounded. Only a year earlier the Barnum & Bailey clowns' performance included a comical suffrage meeting. A clown in drag pontificating on women's suffrage caused another clown to lose his head, and then run headless from the ring. The suffragist clown and the disembodied head were then stuffed into a



*Pictured here later in the season, May Wirth and Victoria Davenport both attended the circus suffrage meeting in March 1912. Left to Right: May Wirth, Orrin Davenport, and Victoria Davenport.*

Circus World Museum

mini-patrol wagon for their exit.<sup>5</sup>

The Barnum & Bailey press agents did find ways to capitalize on the uniqueness of the 1912 meeting, but Robinson was serious in her endeavor to organize circus women for suffrage. After an eventful life both in and out of the circus, she understood what suffrage could mean for women, especially working women like those in the circus.

\* \* \*

Born Josephine DeMott, and often called Josie by her friends, she claimed to have made her circus debut at the age of three, standing on the back of a pony and tied securely to a harness. The short ride around the ring was the culmination of her relentless begging to be part of her parents' equestrian act.<sup>6</sup> By the time she was 13 she was the star of the family show and soon considered one of the top female circus riders in the United States. She was reportedly one of only two women turning somersaults on the back of a horse at that time, and circus agent John A. Dingess once described her as "the very perfection of art and the embodiment of one's wildest dreams."<sup>7</sup>



*This publicity photograph of Josephine DeMott Robinson often appeared alongside newspaper articles promoting her performance with Barnum & Bailey in 1907 and 1908.*

Circus World Museum

In 1891, when she was in her early 20s, she married Charles Robinson, a son of circus owner John F. Robinson. She decided to leave the circus to support his political ambitions and made an uneasy attempt to fit into Victorian society. She despised the confining clothing and felt stifled by the slow movements required of a lady. "I ate as if I were listening to a dirge and keeping time to it," she wrote in her

memoir, *The Circus Lady*.<sup>8</sup> When she found some joy in learning to ride her new bicycle, she was admonished by the local pastor for riding past the church.<sup>9</sup> When her husband's political career faltered, she followed him to Alaska to prospect for gold. After three years' failure to get rich, they came to New York, and settled on a farm in Long Island, but she still struggled to fit in.

"When I thought too long about my vanished world I felt blue and unhappy," she wrote of this period, "so I tried to put it out of my mind."<sup>10</sup>

In 1905, she had finally had enough. The family's finances were tight, and Robinson intended to earn a living the best way she knew how. She was going to return to the circus. This was a ludicrous idea – she was close to 40 and she had not performed in 15 years. She didn't even own a proper circus horse. Then one day on a visit to New York City, she



*Josephine DeMott Robinson around the time she made her comeback in 1906.*

Circus World Museum



fell in love with a horse pulling a milk cart.<sup>11</sup> She could tell just by looking at him that he would make a good performing horse, and even though he wasn't for sale she refused to take no for an answer and bought him. She named him My Joe and started his training. She had a dirt ring built on the property and was delighted when he "could run around the twenty-two-foot circle at least eight times...without getting dizzy."<sup>12</sup> Her husband watched all this with a confused amazement that turned into concern. "He talked and talked," she wrote, "trying to persuade me not to do it. I told him it would help our finances very much," but he was against it.<sup>13</sup>

Next, she would train herself. She sewed new practice slippers and cleared a space in her parlor to exercise. She gripped the fireplace mantel like a ballet bar and kicked her leg forward, then swept it around behind her. Before she completed the full movement, she knew how weak she had really become. She dropped to the floor and sobbed.

When she knew they were ready, she went to talk to Mr. Bailey. He did not ask her to audition; her word and past reputation were enough to secure a job.<sup>16</sup> Rehearsals progressed smoothly, and she worked to acclimate My Joe to the noisy new surroundings. During the final evening dress rehearsal, she did one, two, three somersaults atop her mount, executing each perfectly. She rode into the ring confidently the next afternoon during the matinee, feeling at last that she was back where she belonged. The act was going well, and standing on the back of her horse, she leapt into the air to jump over a banner being passed under her feet. She had performed this trick before on My Joe, but this time one of the men manipulating the banner was green, and coupled with a green horse, disaster struck. My Joe was startled and "cut across the ring" while Robinson was high in the air. She fell onto the wooden ring. Her knee took the blow, and pain shot up her side. She picked herself up and finished



*Gathered for the suffrage meeting, the circus women pose for a group photograph in the Barnum & Bailey animal menagerie in Madison Square Garden, March 31, 1912.*

Circus World Museum

"I cried for my old place in the circus," she wrote, "and...I cried to find what a weak, worthless body I owned."<sup>14</sup>

After this one moment of self-pity, she got back to work. "Days passed into weeks and weeks into months," she wrote. "There were some dark days – very dark – but every day saw the routine gone through by My Joe and myself. When we actually felt a real chance of going back to the ring, the dark days fled forever. I had one thought now. I was going home."<sup>15</sup>

the act. Then she was taken back to her hotel and a doctor was called. He told her she had fractured two ribs and torn the ligaments surrounding her knee, and it would be eight months before she could walk on that leg again.<sup>17</sup>

She quickly decided that the doctor had said she couldn't walk for eight months, but he had not said anything about when she could ride. "Maybe I did limp a bit while I was getting on the horse," she wrote, "but exactly two months from the time I was forced to leave the ring I was back in it again."

This decision angered her husband Charles. For Robinson the choice seems to have been easy, she wrote simply that they “agreed to a definite understanding, each to go [their] own way.”<sup>18</sup>

She performed with the Barnum & Bailey Circus for three seasons before finally retiring a second time in late 1908. But this time she knew she “would never again become the weakling that those years in society had made me.”<sup>19</sup> She opened a riding school near her farm and began teaching fitness classes to “a lot of stout women” who might need to “run with fair comfort if they were late for an appointment.”<sup>20</sup>

“It was during this part of my life that suffrage started in real earnest,” she wrote. “At first, when I watched one of these excited mobs of women with their yellow and black standards, their excited voice, their parades that never ended... I was alarmed.” But soon she joined the cause, becoming a “valuable acquisition” for her horsemanship and physical strength. “I could ride Comet and make him stand up straight in the air, while I waved a suffrage banner with a firm hand and a high arm. I could lead a parade. I could carry soapboxes for speakers.”<sup>21</sup>

Then she turned to organizing the women she knew best.

\* \* \*

Determined to continue with the meeting, Florence and Robinson set out to secure a replacement speaker. That morning they arrived at the Women’s Political Union headquarters on East 29<sup>th</sup> Street, during a tea in honor of Dr. Anna Shaw, a suffrage movement leader. While the two circus women may not have been invited, according to the *New York Times*, these “strong and earnest women” impressed the suffragists, who sent over Miss Beatrice Jones “as a committee of one.”<sup>22</sup> Back in the Madison Square Garden menagerie, “[Jones] planted herself in the center of a group of 25 or more women and girls, modishly and sedately gowned, so that you would never dream it was their daily lot to bound about, blithe and bespangled,” and asked assurances from the women that their intentions were sincere.<sup>23</sup> Once they had convinced her, she helped them elect officers and told them how they could contribute to the cause.

Robinson stood to speak. “You earn salaries,” she said. “Some of you have property. You have a right to say what shall be done with it. You want to establish clearly in the mind of your husband that you are his equal. You are not above him, but his equal. You are not slaves.”<sup>24</sup> As she spoke, according to the press, “an indignant-looking circus man shouldered his way into the group and subtracted a docile wife and daughter from it.”<sup>25</sup> (Some accounts report it was his wife and sister-in-law.) *The Sacramento Union* in California



A woman addresses the group at the suffrage meeting, the animal wagons and giraffe pen can be seen in the background.

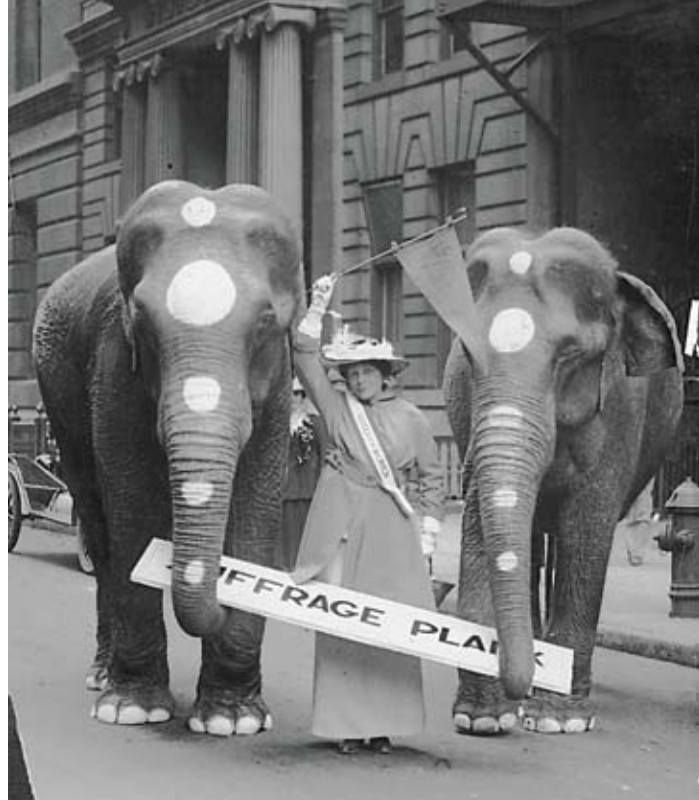
Circus World Museum



quoted him saying “that he didn’t intend to let his wife take part in such nonsense” and the *New York Tribune* claimed he was tired of waiting for his dinner.<sup>26</sup> Multiple newspapers focused more on the annoyed husband and the audience of wild animals than they did on the suffrage meeting itself.

The disgruntled husband’s interruption did not dampen their spirits and to celebrate the newly formed suffrage group, the women named the baby giraffe Miss Suffrage. A photo of the new “Miss Suffie” appeared in the *New York Herald* the next day. That the meeting took place in the animal menagerie, and was attended by the press, showing that the Barnum & Bailey higher-ups had fully approved the gathering. Throughout the rest of the season press about the suffrage meeting also appeared in some local papers a few days before the circus arrived.

A week after the meeting, Robinson and other representatives of the newly formed group attended a tea with the leaders of the Women’s Political Union. Robinson again addressed the group:



*Suffragist Portia Willis with elephants Jennie and Lena during a suffrage parade held during the Republican and Progressive national conventions in Chicago, June 7, 1916. The sign the elephants carried represented the party’s suffrage plank.*

Carrie Chapman Catt Papers, Bryn Mawr College Special Collections

“The circus women live in a little world of their own, roaming all over this country ... until age or accident knocks them out. They are thrifty, hard-working people ... they do daring deeds, of a kind unknown to the people outside... There is no class of women who could be of more assistance to the cause than we women, who are constantly traveling...”

Suffragist Elizabeth Cook agreed. “There is no class of women who show better that they have a right to vote than the circus women,” she said, “who twice a day prove that they have the courage and endurance of men.” Miss Emily Pierson joined in, “I saw Mrs. [Sandwina] throwing those men around, and I thought that men, seeing their own sex done up that way, could never say that women hadn’t physical force.”<sup>27</sup>

\* \* \*

While circus women embraced suffrage, suffragists had also begun to embrace the circus. “Wherever there are parades the woman’s cause will be represented by floats or a delegation of women in decorated automobiles or on foot,” declared a writer for the *Woman’s Journal* in 1912. The same article reported that on July 6, suffragists were planning to “carry water to the thirsty crowds” on circus day. They would “say a few words for the cause or pass the drinker a leaflet.”<sup>28</sup> The large crowds that gathered for the circus created an easy audience for the suffrage campaigners. They were generally



*Sandwina lifting her husband during her act made an impression on the New York suffragist who attended the circus. Katie Sandwina lithograph, 1912.*

The Ringling, Tibbals Circus Collection

well received, and at least two of the Ringling brothers' wives were reported to be "deeply interested in the movement" and were counted as "members of the suffrage society at Baraboo." Multiple times that year groups of suffragists circulated flyers to crowds gathered for the Ringling Bros. Circus.<sup>29</sup> *The Woman's Journal* credits the wives' participation as at least partly responsible for the "co-operation of the Ringling Brothers in reaching with literature the crowds that attended the circus."<sup>30</sup> In North Dakota a decorated suffrage float even joined the 1914 Ringling parade.<sup>31</sup>

Suffragists also found other ways to use the excitement of the circus to further their cause. Miss Suffie, the baby giraffe was not the only circus animal to be asked to participate in the movement. In 1913, a Miss Florence Luscomb convinced a circus manager to allow her to put a six-foot suffrage sign on a camel walking in a circus parade.<sup>32</sup> Though perhaps the most impressive use of circus animals for the suffrage cause happened in Chicago in 1916 during the Republican National Convention. "To urge an equal suffrage plank in the Republican platform, forty thousand women, two elephants and a goat marched down Michigan Boulevard to the Coliseum where the Grand Old Party meets today," reported *The Evening Missourian*.<sup>33</sup> There were actually three elephants involved, Lena, Jennie, and the nine-month old Chin-Chin, all part of Powers circus elephants. Lena and Jennie led the parade and carried a painted wooden board with their trunks, representing the "suffrage plank" and little Chin-Chin wore a "Votes for Women" blanket.

Securing the vote for women was a massive undertaking, and the connections to the circus are only a tiny part of that story, but some suffragists saw that the circus could help them promote their cause. It was also clear to the circus women who met that Sunday afternoon in the animal menagerie that suffrage could benefit them as working women. As one of the New York suffragists had said, "The time has gone by when a woman can think only of herself. If a circus woman is ill-treated it is my concern; if I am underpaid it is something for you to see to. We are all part of a great sisterhood, and that is what suffrage is."<sup>34</sup> **BW**



*Elephants Jennie and baby Chin-Chin marched for the cause during a Chicago suffrage parade held during the Republican and Progressive national conventions. The elephants were William Elmer Powers "house" elephants brought from the New York Hippodrome.*

Carrie Chapman Catt Papers, Bryn Mawr College Special Collections

*An earlier version of this article first appeared in Narratively, a media platform and production company that celebrates the diversity of humanity through authentic storytelling.*



## About the Author

Kat Vecchio's work explores American entertainment history and popular culture. She has written articles for *Atlas Obscura* and *Narratively* about circus and burlesque history and produced and directed a feature documentary about roller derby. Her current research focuses on the lives of female performers in the late 19th and early 20th centuries. At the 2018 Circus Historical Society convention, she gave a presentation on female circus performers' participation in early movie stunt work. She works as the director of grantmaking at Fork Films in New York City and was an associate producer for Fork Films' documentary "The Trials of Spring."





About 35 performers and costume attendants posed for this photograph in the women's section of the 1913 Barnum & Bailey dressing room tent.

Greg Parkinson collection

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# BRIDGEPORT BABIES

## Barnum & Bailey Giraffes Born in Winter Quarters

by Greg Parkinson

Following the arrival of two giraffes in the United States in June of 1838, many American menageries, zoos, and circuses exhibited these tall animals originally captured during expeditions in Africa.<sup>1</sup> However, there was no known instance of a giraffe giving birth to an offspring in the United States until October 20, 1889. On that date, a male giraffe was born just after 10:00 in the morning at the Cincinnati Zoological Garden.<sup>2</sup> *The Cincinnati Enquirer* provided extensive coverage of the birth and reported that the little fellow would likely be given the name “Sunday,” acknowledging the day of the week on which he was born. Unfortunately, the baby giraffe died five days later on October 25.<sup>3</sup>

The next documented birth of a giraffe in the United States did not occur for two decades.<sup>4</sup> That makes it especially astounding that five giraffes were born at the Barnum

& Bailey winter quarters in Bridgeport between 1910 and 1918 – all of the same mother.

The first of the happy arrivals appeared on January 14, 1910.<sup>5</sup> An eight-year-old giraffe named Mary gave birth just before daybreak to a female later christened “Bumbeeno” [sic].<sup>6</sup> The father was a five-year-old male named Fritz. Menagerie Superintendent John Patterson and veteran giraffe keeper Andrew Zingraben were prominent in the news coverage of the birth that continued for several days. Five months later during the under-canvas tour, Barnum & Bailey was back in its hometown. On June 24, show owners Otto and John Ringling were on the lot in Bridgeport where the baby giraffe made a huge hit in the menagerie tent.<sup>7</sup> For a short while, the young giraffe continued to be called Bumbeeno, but after the brothers moved her to their Ringling Bros. unit she was renamed Jennie.<sup>8</sup>

Mary delivered a second baby at the Bridgeport quarters on January 31, 1912.<sup>9</sup> Two months later when the circus was in New York, the infant giraffe was given the name “Miss Suffrage.”<sup>10</sup> [Kat Vecchio’s article in this issue of *Bandwagon* provides the details of this event.] At the end of the season when Barnum & Bailey returned to Bridgeport, little Suffrage was hailed as having been the show’s biggest feature that year.<sup>11</sup> However, the moniker soon vanished, and the giraffe that had been born back in January began to be identified as a male named Harry.<sup>12</sup>

The pattern of Mary giving birth at the winter quarters on two-year intervals continued. A female giraffe was born on March 2, 1914.<sup>13</sup> That day she was given the name Anna Louise to honor the daughter of Charles Hutchinson, the show’s treasurer.<sup>14</sup> On January 20, 1916, a giraffe was born under Andy Zingraben’s watchful eye.<sup>15</sup> Reporters on hand were told that the lanky baby had been dubbed Phineas T. for self-evident reasons.

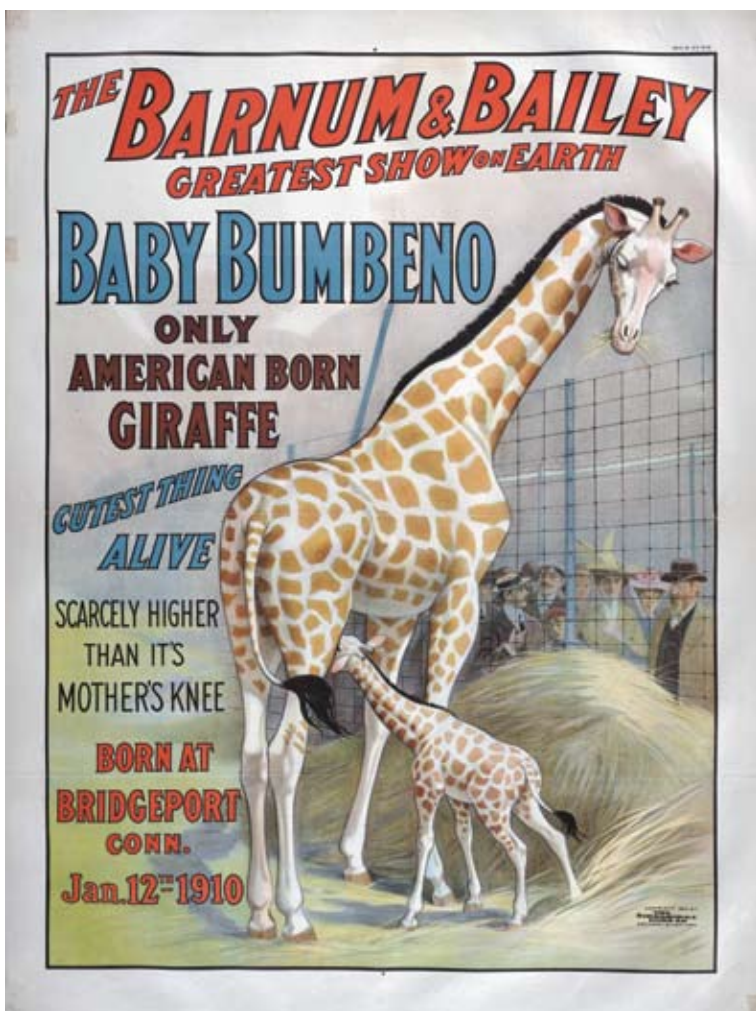
The fifth biennial baby giraffe was born in 1918 on Lincoln’s birthday, February 12.<sup>16</sup> About two months later when Barnum & Bailey’s *Greatest Show on Earth* again made its spring opening in New York, the endearing female calf was christened Nancy Hanks, a tribute to Abraham Lincoln’s mother.<sup>17</sup> The mother giraffe, Mary, was about 16 years old at the time.

Mary continued to tour on the newly combined Ringling Bros. and Barnum & Bailey show, returning to Bridgeport each winter. However, there is no record of her giving birth to any additional babies after 1918. She died on July 20, 1924 after the circus arrived in Aurora, Illinois.<sup>18</sup>

The amalgamated show of 1919 had more giraffes than

*This 1910 lithograph advertised the first baby giraffe to be born in the Bridgeport winter quarters. A year or so later, the Ringlings renamed the giraffe Jennie. Although the poster notes January 12 as the birthday, newspaper coverage confirms January 14 as the correct date.*

The Ringling, Tibbals Circus Collection





About two months after Mary gave birth to her fifth baby, Nancy, the tiny giraffe was photographed through the open gate in the corral at Madison Square Garden. Andrew Zingraben maintained the mother's attention with treats as the photographer snapped the picture. The lower of the two signs behind the keeper reads, "Born Feb. 12, 1918."

Greg Parkinson collection

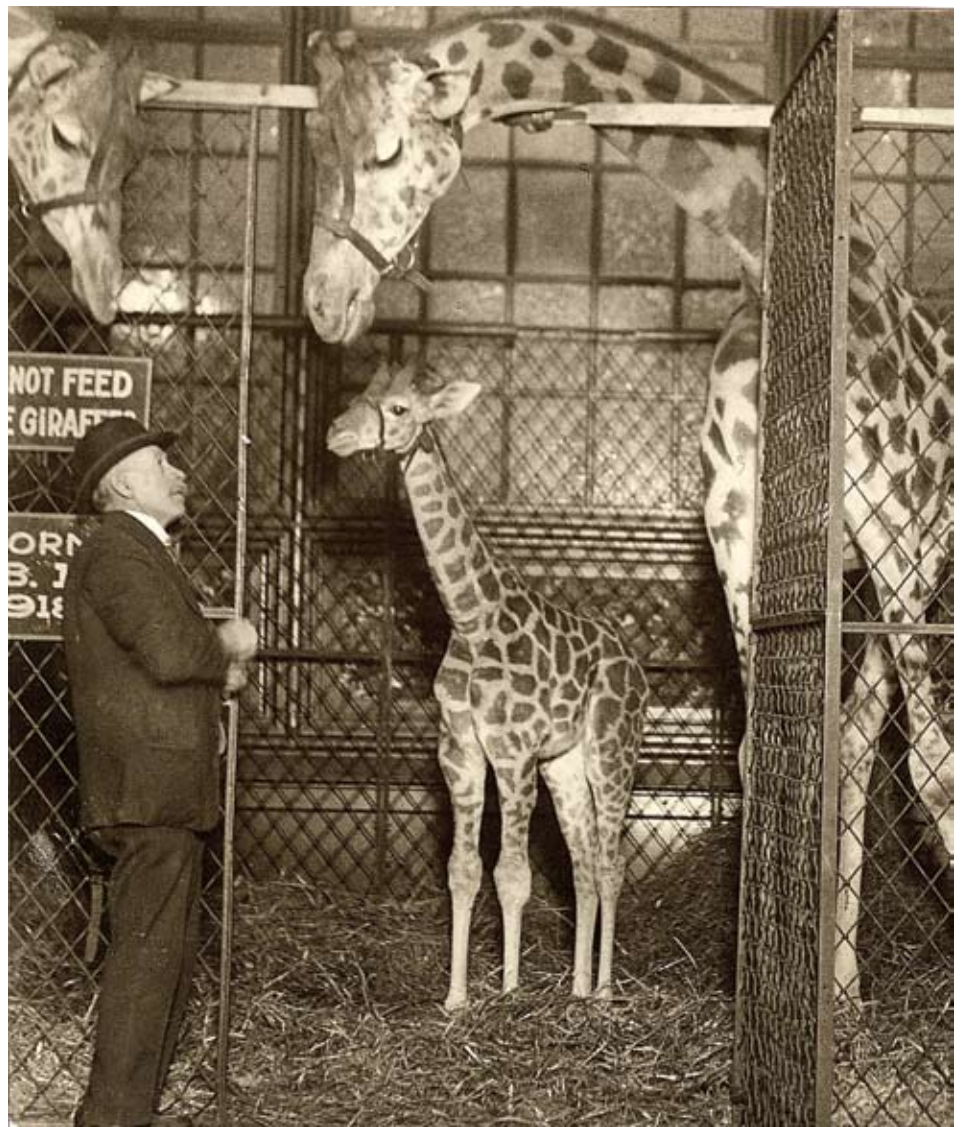
needed for the tour, so the first Bridgeport baby, Jennie, along with another giraffe, were placed on loan to the New York Zoological Park in the Bronx. The Ringling organization reclaimed Jennie for its Hagenbeck-Wallace circus in June 1933. She was pregnant at the time and gave birth to a female giraffe at the Peru winter quarters on January 17, 1934. Jennie, a.k.a. Bumbeno, died during Hagenbeck's loadout that spring.<sup>19</sup>

The giraffe born in 1916, originally hailed as Phineas, was apparently renamed Louis at some point. He died on the Ringling-Barnum train on the night of July 18-19, 1934 en route to Cincinnati.<sup>20</sup> Anna, the 1914 baby, died on the show only three weeks later on August 9, 1934 in Peoria, Illinois.<sup>21</sup> How long Harry and Nancy lived has not been ascertained.

Before coming to the United States, Hungarian Andrew Zingraben had worked for a number of years with Carl Hagenbeck's operations in Germany. While Barnum & Bailey was in France in 1902, the show bought two giraffes from Hagenbeck. Zingraben was hired by the circus to care for these animals, and he accompanied them to the United States following the end of the European tour. After both of these giraffes died in 1903, the circus acquired four more of the exotic animals and placed them under Zingraben's care.<sup>22</sup> One of these was, Mary, who would become the mother of each of the five Bridgeport babies. Zingraben oversaw the Barnum & Bailey and subsequently the Ringling-Barnum giraffes until his death in Sarasota on September 24, 1931. He was about 70 years old. **BW**

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# The Circus and th

*by Chris Berry*

*Ringling Bros. and Barnum & Bailey's 1942 wartime spec "Drums of Victory" was a pageant of patriotism. Enormous portraits of Franklin Roosevelt were unfurled at the conclusion of the circus performance.*

*The Ringling Museum, Tibbals Circus Collection*

On the morning of May 13, 1924, Merle Evans and the Ringling Bros. and Barnum & Bailey band were rehearsing a new march, a familiar tune, yet one not normally associated with the circus. At a little after two o'clock that afternoon, a limousine pulled onto the lot at the corner of Florida Avenue and 5<sup>th</sup> Street in Northeast Washington, D.C., and John Ringling greeted President Calvin Coolidge and the First Lady. As the presidential party entered the big top the circus

band played "Hail to the Chief," and the enormous crowd cheered their arrival. After acknowledging the warm welcome, the nation's number one circus fan took a front row seat and sat down to enjoy *The Greatest Show on Earth*.<sup>1</sup>

Although stories and photographs of the Coolidges were splashed across newspapers from coast-to-coast, on that afternoon in the spring of 1924, the 30<sup>th</sup> president of the United States was just another fan. He was continuing a rela-



# e Presidency



*John Ringling welcomed Calvin and Grace Coolidge to The Greatest Show on Earth in 1924.*

Circus World Museum

Ricketts was already well known in Europe when he made the trip from London to Philadelphia in 1792, and shortly after arriving, he announced that he would build a riding school and what he called a “circus” not far from where Philadelphia’s impressive City Hall now stands. Ricketts’ outdoor arena was completed in October 1792 and was designed as both an entertainment center and an academy where men and women could take lessons in horsemanship.<sup>2</sup>

The riding school quickly became popular among Philadelphians of means, but it was not until April 3, 1793 that the first tickets were sold for what was advertised as an “unparalleled equestrian performance.”

It was on that day that the first circus was held in America.<sup>3</sup>

The program emphasized horsemanship and was presented in a 42-foot circus ring, the same size that Philip Astley had used at the first British circus performance in 1768. The arena seated about 800 and the floor was a combination of sawdust and dirt, mixed together to protect the horses’ hooves.

Although Philadelphia was bustling in the 1790s, entertainment options were limited, and Ricketts’ circus was suddenly the talk of the town. Only 19 days after the circus opened President George Washington attended a performance on April 22, 1793.

Washington’s appearance that afternoon is significant both to circus historians as well as scholars of American history, as only hours earlier the President had signed the *Proclamation of Neutrality*, an early diplomatic announce-

tionship with the circus that began with George Washington and that has extended more than two centuries to the current occupant of the Oval Office, President Donald Trump.

The unique bond between the circus and the Presidency began in 1793 when George Washington visited John Bill Ricketts’ equestrian arena located at the corner of Market and Twelfth streets in the nation’s first capital of Philadelphia.



ment that would help define the international role of the United States. It stated that the United States would remain neutral in a conflict that was developing between England and France and promised that any American who provided support or aid to either country would face legal action.<sup>4</sup>

Perhaps it was the several days of intense Cabinet meetings that played into Washington's decision to take some time off and attend Ricketts' circus, but whether it was the stress of the job, or just a chance to take a break, he evidently enjoyed the show. Only two days later the President was back, accompanied by seven others including his stepchildren, George Washington Park Custis and Eleanor Park Custis.<sup>5</sup>

America's first circus provided a showcase for Ricketts' equestrian talent, and his horsemanship was impressive. A reporter who saw a Ricketts performance in 1794 wrote, "It may be said without exaggeration that he is perhaps the most graceful, neat and expert public performer on horseback that has ever appeared in any part of the world."

The review went on to describe Ricketts leaping over ten horses, riding with a boy on his shoulder and dancing on the saddle with "the horse at full speed." The circus was described as "a place to dispel the gloom of the thoughtful, exercise the lively activity of the young, and relax the mind of the sedentary."<sup>6</sup>

The show was a hit and as its popularity grew, it was not long until Ricketts added a group of pantomime clowns to the performance. Among those in the troupe was John Durang, a dancer and actor who was one of the President's favorite performers. Durang was joined by a clown named Matt Sully and a tight ropewalker billed as Sinior Spinacuta.<sup>7</sup>

As George Washington was preparing to leave office following the election of 1796, Ricketts was featured at two events that honored the President's service to the young nation. The first was a command performance of sorts presented on January 24, 1797. The show, which marked Washing-



*John Bill Ricketts came to the United States in 1792 and became one of America's first entertainment celebrities.*

Pennsylvania Historical Society

ton's retirement from public life, was held "at the desire of the President." The second on February 22, was a celebration of Washington's 65th birthday.<sup>8</sup>

The birthday performance also included "a string of flip-flaps by the manager," along with pony races and a pantomime performance of Washington's life that concluded with a scene of the President leaving for his home in Mount Vernon.<sup>9</sup>

Ten days later, art became reality as John Adams was inaugurated, becoming the second President, and Washington retired to his Virginia estate.

A few weeks after Adams took office, *The New York Gazette* reported that as Washington left for Mount Vernon, one of his horses was sold to Ricketts for the substantial sum of \$150. The newspaper also announced that on April 29, "The celebrated horse Jack, who was in the American War with General Washington and presented to Mr. Ricketts, will make his first appearance in the circus."<sup>10</sup>

Although there is no record that Jack actually performed in the show, it may be that his appearance at the circus was simply an effort to draw audiences eager to see the horse once ridden by the President.

While we do not know the names of many who visited the Ricketts circus, we do know that John Adams was among those who attended a performance when he was Vice President. In letter to his wife Abigail, Adams mentioned that he had taken their 25-year old son Charles to see the Ricketts circus, though he did not provide any detail on the performance.<sup>11</sup>

Like Washington, Adams must have enjoyed the circus as he attended a similar performance during a trip to New York in the fall of 1797. On October 21, President Adams attended a show which was presented in an amphitheater that Ricketts had built near the corner of Greenwich Street and Rector, just a few blocks from where the New York Stock Exchange stands today.

Although Ricketts had opened the building only a few months earlier, it is likely the circus which President Adams saw was actually produced by a competitor named Philip



Lailson who had rented the arena from Ricketts.

Starting in the summer of 1797, Lailson's performance alternated nightly with a program produced by a Philadelphia theatrical company, and on the night when President Adams attended the circus, John Bill Ricketts was actually performing in Toronto.<sup>12</sup>

Even though Ricketts himself was not on the bill, President Adams was treated to a program that included "Miss Venice, a female rider, the first in the country." The pioneer equestrienne rode "standing on a single horse, with all the gracefulness of her sex."<sup>13</sup>

Over the next several years, John Bill Ricketts stature grew as one of America's first entertainment celebrities. He became such a prominent figure that artist Gilbert Stuart, who painted iconic portraits of Washington, also painted a portrait of Ricketts titled *John Bill Ricketts and his Horse Cornplanter*.

Ricketts' success soon allowed him to build arenas in a number of cities and within a few years, his performances were seen in Baltimore, Boston, Albany and Toronto.

Americans were clearly developing an appetite for the circus, however when George Washington died in December of 1799, Ricketts joined others in suspending his performances out of respect to the President. Unfortunately, only a few days into the period of national mourning Ricketts' Philadelphia arena burned.

The loss of the amphitheater is believed to be one of the reasons that Ricketts decided to leave America in early 1800, chartering a small sailing ship with custom made stalls for his horses and enough lumber to build a new arena somewhere in the Caribbean.

As Ricketts was sailing south of Haiti, his ship was captured by French pirates, and although he survived the ordeal, the buccaneers stole his horses and supplies leaving him with nothing but his equestrian abilities. After ultimately recovering most of his equipment and horses on the island of Guadeloupe, Ricketts was able to regroup. He eventually sold his horses and booked passage to England, but he never made it. In late 1802, the man who brought



*The "Father of Our Country" was the perfect figure to endorse the Big United States Circus and Great Eastern Menagerie c. 1886.*

The Ringling Museum, Tibbals Circus Collection

the circus to America and who had performed for the first two presidents was lost at sea.<sup>14</sup>

After Ricketts left Philadelphia, there were very few circuses in the United States until 1807 when Frenchman Jean Baptiste Casmire Breschard and an American named Victor Pepin constructed an arena just north of Boston. The team of Breschard and Pepin succeeded Ricketts as America's prominent circus owners and performers, creating a show which eventually toured as far south as Richmond, Virginia. While there is no record that the pair performed for any president, they did work closely with architect Benjamin Latrobe, a close friend of Thomas Jefferson. It was Latrobe who designed and built Breschard and Pepin's circus building in Pittsburgh at about the same time that he began working as the architect for the new Capitol Building in Washington, D.C.<sup>15</sup>

Thomas Jefferson is remembered today for both his intellect and curiosity, and it should come as no surprise that throughout his life he was intrigued by ex-

otic animals that were often displayed at public markets and fairsgrounds.

America's third president was always learning, through both his massive library and real-life experiences, many of which are described in his diaries. Even as a very young man, Jefferson would keep detailed notes on his spending habits, including how much money he spent to see exotic animals which were rare in the New World.

Jefferson was 23 years old when he paid "two Spanish bits" (the equivalent of 25-cents) to see a "tyger" in Williamsburg in 1769. More than 50 years later, at the age of 76, and long retired from public service, he was still willing to pay a showman 50-cents to see a small menagerie that visited his hometown of Charlottesville, Virginia. Included in that traveling zoo was a paca, which is a large spotted rodent from South America that is sometimes referred to as a "royal rat." For half dollar the former president recorded seeing not only the paca, but also "lions and camels."

In the 18<sup>th</sup> century, wild animals were more accessible in Europe than the New World, and when Jefferson went

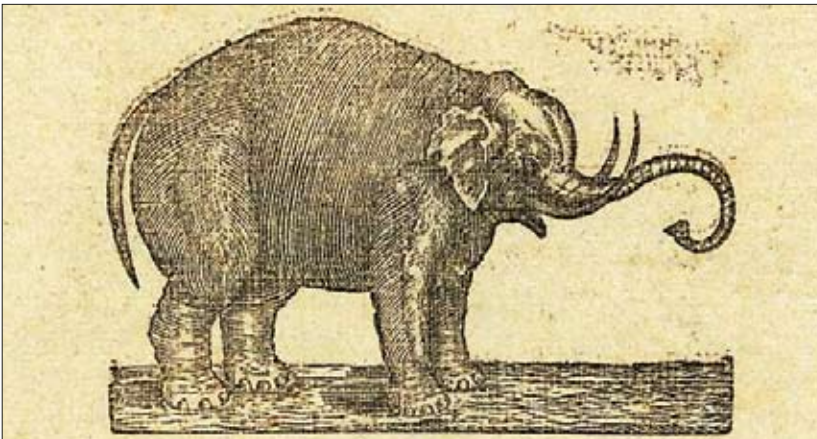


abroad in 1784, he kept detailed records of the wild animals that he encountered in markets and during his visits to the royal menageries in both France and England. During a trip to Versailles, Jefferson recorded seeing many birds, and a handful of wild animals, including a rhinoceros which King Louis XVI displayed in an octagonal building that was adorned with animal paintings.

After Jefferson returned to the United States in 1789, Washington appointed him Secretary of State, and in 1796, he ran for president, losing to John Adams in the Electoral College by a vote of 71-68. Under the original rules of the Constitution, the candidate who received the second most votes by the electors automatically became vice president, and in 1797 Jefferson returned to Philadelphia for the inauguration of John Adams and his own swearing-in as vice president.

Shortly after arriving in the capital that winter, Jefferson wrote in his diary that he had paid 50-cents to see an elephant, no doubt the animal which has been identified as "The Crowninshield Elephant," believed to be the first of its kind exhibited in the United States and a major attraction in Philadelphia in 1796 and 1797. Jefferson was not the only prominent official to see the attraction. Prior to leaving Philadelphia for his retirement in Virginia, President George Washington also made mention of seeing the elephant.<sup>16</sup>

It was not only wild animals that interested Jefferson. In 1799 when he was vice president, Jefferson recorded that he spent 25-cents to see "Caleb Philips, a dwarf." A newspaper of the time reported that the boy's name was actually Calvin Philips, and at the age of seven he was displayed as



**THE  
ELEPHANT,**

ACCORDING to the account of the celebrated BUFFON, is the most respectable Animal in the world. In size he surpasses all other terrestrial creatures; and by his intelligence, makes as near an approach to man, as matter can approach spirit. A sufficient proof that there is not too much said of the knowledge of this animal is, that the Proprietor having been absent for ten weeks, the moment he arrived at the door of his apartment, and spoke to the keeper, the animal's knowledge was beyond any doubt confirmed by the cries he uttered forth, till his Friend came within reach of his trunk, with which he caressed him, to the astonishment of all those who saw him. This most curious and surprising animal is just arrived in this town, from Philadelphia, where he will stay but a few days. — He is only four years old, and weighs about 6000 weight, but will not have come to his full growth till he shall be between 30 and 40 years old. He measures from the end of his trunk to the tip of his tail 15 feet 8 inches, round the body 10 feet 6 inches, round his head 7 feet 2 inches, round his leg above the knee 3 feet 3 inches, round his ankle 2 feet 2 inches. He eats 130 weight a day, and drinks all kinds of spirituous liquors; some days he has drank 30 bottles of porter, drawing the corks with his trunk. He is so tame that he travels loose, and has never attempted to hurt any one. He appeared on the stage, at the New Theatre in Philadelphia, to the great satisfaction of a respectable audience. A respectable and convenient place is fitted up adjoining the Store of Mr. Barlett, Market-Street, for the reception of those ladies and gentlemen who may be pleased to view the greatest natural curiosity ever presented to the curious, which is to be seen from sunrise till sundown, every day in the week.

⚠ The Elephant having destroyed many papers of consequence, it is recommended to visitors not to come near him with such papers.

Admittance **ONE QUARTER OF A DOLLAR** — Children **ONE EIGHTH OF A DOLLAR.**  
NEWBURYPORT, Sept. 19, 1797.

*Both George Washington and Thomas Jefferson were among those who paid 50-cents to see "The Crowninshield Elephant," the first of its kind to be exhibited in the United States.*

Circus World Museum

a curiosity who was 26-inches tall and weighed 12 pounds.<sup>17</sup>

Over the years, Jefferson also paid to see a number of circus-style acts, although they apparently were not presented in the typical arena of the time. In 1772, he wrote of seeing a trick rider in Williamsburg who we now believe was the early equestrian performer Joseph Faulks.<sup>18</sup>

While in London in 1786, Jefferson also attended a performance featuring Philip Astley, the father of the modern circus.

The final entries in Jefferson's diaries were written very late in life and two of them involved entertainment that was presented for the amusement of his grandchildren. One was a performance by a ventriloquist, and the second was a family outing on June 12, 1826, less than a month before his death on July 4 at the age of 83.

Although Jefferson recorded that the family attended a "shew [sic] of horsemanship" that day, it is likely that it was a small traveling circus that visited Charlottesville almost exactly 50 years after he had written the Declaration of Independence.<sup>19</sup>

When James Monroe announced that he was running for president in 1816, the possibility of choosing yet another president from Virginia had created dissension among some of the electors in New England. New York Senator Rufus King provided strong opposition to Monroe, yet when the Electoral College met, Monroe won 16 states, while King won only three. One of the battleground states during that election was Massachusetts, and to shore up support there, Monroe made a campaign swing through New England and made speeches in a number of towns.

The visit of a presidential candidate would be big news in any community, but in Haverhill, Massachusetts in 1816,



Monroe's campaign speech coincided with the arrival of a circus and menagerie, an experience that was later written about by poet John Greenleaf Whittier, who was a child at the time. Based on Whittier's recollections it was likely Hackaliah Bailey's circus and the famous elephant "Old Bet" that came to Haverhill on the same day as James Monroe.<sup>20</sup>

According to Whittier's biographer,

"The Quaker boy was not allowed the privilege of seeing either the collection of wild beasts or the Commander-in-Chief. He didn't care much for the circus, but he was anxious to see the President of the United States. The next day he trudged all the way to Haverhill to see at least some of the footsteps in the street that the great man had left behind him. He found at last an impression of an elephant's foot in the road and supposing this to be James Monroe's track, he followed it as far as he could distinguish it. Then he went home, satisfied that he had seen the footsteps of the greatest man in the country."<sup>21</sup>

Just as Jefferson had visited Astley's in London, John Quincy Adams, also attended a circus performance in Europe, only for Adams, the arena was in Paris rather than London, and it happened ten years before he was elected America's sixth president.

After Adams negotiated the treaty that ended the War of 1812, he and his family moved to Paris where he spent the winter and spring of 1815 enjoying the city's restaurants and social life. On May 6, 1815 Adams took his wife Louisa and their eight-year-old son Charles on a family outing to see the famous Cirque Olympique de Franconi, which the Italian Antonio Franconi had started in 1783 in collaboration with England's Philip Astley.

Adams, a prolific diarist, memorialized the evening at Cirque Olympic, where he and his family "saw exercises of horsemanship, the trained deer "Coco" and a pantomime called "Le Pic Terrible [The Terrible Peak]."<sup>22</sup>

From the sophistication of Paris to the growing cities of the United States, new entertainment options were becoming available to the public, and that included traveling circuses. At the beginning of the 1800s, circuses would exhibit in large population centers for weeks at a time, and then as roads began to improve and the population expanded, they were able to travel farther and move into new territory. By 1836, there were twelve circus companies operating in America and almost all of them used tents exclusively instead of permanent structures.<sup>23</sup>

At the same time that tented circuses were gaining a foothold in America, a 25-year-old named Phineas Taylor Barnum first appeared on the public stage, exhibiting a curiosity that he claimed had a direct link to George Washington, now an American folk hero who had been dead more than 35 years.

Barnum created a sensation in the summer of 1835 when

he began promoting an African American woman named Joice Heth, who he said was 161 years old and had assisted at the birth of the first president, 103 years before.

As Barnum explained it, "She was quite garrulous about her protégé 'dear little George,' adding, 'As a nurse she put the first clothes on the infant and she claimed to have 'raised him.'"

The act was simple. Barnum would rent a hall and when Heth appeared before the assembled audience, she would ramble on with tales about young George Washington while frequently quoting the Bible.

Barnum later said that when he purchased Joice Heth he assumed that her story about being Washington's nursemaid was authentic, and it was only after she died that he was told by the doctor who performed her autopsy that she was "considerably less aged than had been assumed."<sup>24</sup>

**THE GREATEST**  
*Natural & National*  
**CURIOSITY**  
*IN THE WORLD.*

**JOICE HETH**

Nurse to GEN. GEORGE WASHINGTON, (the Father of our Country.)  
WILL BE SEEN AT

**Barnum's Hotel, Bridgeport,**  
On FRIDAY, and SATURDAY, the 11th. & 12th days  
of December, DAY and EVENING.

JOICE HETH is unquestionably the most astonishing and interesting curiosity in the World! She was the slave of Augustine Washington, (the father of Gen. Washington,) and was the first person who put clothes on the unconscious infant, who, in after days, led our heroic fathers on to glory, to victory, and freedom. To use her own language when speaking of the illustrious Father of his Country, "she raised him." JOICE HETH was born in the year 1674, and has, consequently, now arrived at the astonishing

**AGE OF 161 YEARS.**

She weighs but FORTY-SIX POUNDS, and yet is very cheerful and interesting. She retains her faculties in an unparalleled degree, converses freely, sings numerous hymns, relates many interesting anecdotes of the boy Washington, and often laughs heartily at her own remarks, or those of the spectators. Her hearth is perfectly good, and her appearance very new. She is a baptist and takes great pleasure in conversing with ministers and religious persons. The appearance of this marvellous relic of antiquity strikes the beholder with amazement, and convinces him that his eyes are resting on the oldest specimen of mortality they ever beheld. Original, authentic, and indisputable documents accompanying her prove, however astonishing the fact may appear, that JOICE HETH is in every respect the person she is represented.

The most eminent physicians and intelligent men in Cincinnati, Philadelphia, New-York, Boston, and other places, have examined this living skeleton and the documents accompanying her, and all, invariably, pronounce her to be, as represented, 161 years of age! A female in continual attendance, and will give every attention to the ladies who visit this relic of by-gone ages.

She has been visited in Philadelphia, New-York, Boston, &c., by more than TWENTY THOUSAND Ladies and Gentlemen, within the last three months.

Hours of Exhibition, from 9 A. M. to 1 P. M. and from 2 to 5, and 6 to 10 P. M.

**ADMITTANCE 25 Cents, CHILDREN HALF-PRICE.**

Trusted by J. B. GUTH & SON, 141, Fish-street N. Y.

*Remains Monday the 11th*

P. T. Barnum said that it was his exhibition of Joice Heth that gave him his "true vocation." Somers, New York Historical Society

According to Barnum, it was his exhibition of “George Washington’s nurse” that gave him “his true vocation.” Soon he was managing an acrobat named “Signor Vivalla,” which took him to Washington D.C. during the administration of Andrew Jackson. Although Barnum did not meet “Old Hickory” on that trip, he did visit with other prominent statesmen, including Henry Clay, John Calhoun, and former President John Quincy Adams.<sup>25</sup>

Shortly after Barnum’s first trip to Washington, Martin Van Buren was elected as the nation’s eighth president, and he was soon embroiled in an international controversy involving a lion which would eventually play a key role in the history of early wild animal acts.

In the summer of 1839, the sultan of Morocco delivered a pair of lions to the American consulate in Tangier with the understanding that they were gifts for President Van Buren. Although federal law prohibited the president from accepting anything of value from a foreign government, the sultan was determined to deliver his present to Washington.

The American diplomat in Tangier soon realized that if he did not accept the lions, he would be insulting not only the sultan but also the entire nation of Morocco. He reluctantly accepted them and put them in a cage in the consulate. Two months later the Consul General received the authorization to ship them to the United States.



*Isaac Van Amburgh's early animal exhibitions included a lion that had once been a gift to President Martin Van Buren.*

The Ringling Museum, Tibbals Circus Collection

When the lions arrived at the Philadelphia Navy Yard, they were auctioned off for \$375, sold to pioneer circus and menagerie owner Lewis Titus.<sup>26</sup>

Titus then shipped the male lion to Paris where animal trainer Isaac Van Amburgh was performing at the Porte St. Martin Theatre. It was that lion, once a gift intended for the President of the United States that solidified Van Amburgh's reputation as an animal trainer. As the act was described, Van Amburgh entered the cage without having any previous contact with the lion and allowed it to lick his face and hands.<sup>27</sup>

It wasn't just wild animal acts that were coming into their own in the early 19<sup>th</sup> century. As Presidents Jackson, Van Buren and Harrison were molding the nation's future, P. T. Barnum's reputation as a showman was also developing. In 1847, a year after the United States had declared war on Mexico, Barnum made his first trip to the President's House, accompanied by nine-year old Charles Sherwood Stratton, who was already an international sensation, billed as “General Tom Thumb.”

After visiting London where they had been presented to Queen Victoria, Barnum and Tom Thumb returned to the United States. Following a four-week engagement at the American Museum in New York, Barnum and Tom Thumb began a tour of the United States which began in Washington with a visit to the Executive Mansion.

President James K. Polk described the scene in his journal of April 13, 1847:

“About two o'clock it was announced to me that General Tom Thumb, a dwarf who is being exhibited in this city and who has become quite celebrated by having been exhibited at all the principal courts of Europe, was in the parlor below stairs and desired to see me. I invited the Cabinet [including Secretary of State and future President James Buchanan] to take a short recess and to walk down with me and they did so. We found a number of ladies and gentlemen in the parlor. Tom Thumb is a most remarkable person. After spending twenty or thirty minutes in the parlor I returned with the Cabinet to my office.”<sup>28</sup>

Although President Polk recorded the meeting in the same language that he might have used for any other distinguished visitor, it was a reporter for *The New York Herald* who realized the remarkable news value of the event, and provided details on the meeting, along with a review of Tom Thumb's performance that evening, the details of which would otherwise have been lost to history:

“General Tom Thumb today visited the White House. The cabinet was in session, but on announcement of the distinguished visitor, they all came down and joined the President's family in the ceremonies of the reception of the warrior. He cracked jokes with them, told anecdotes of his royal





When P. T. Barnum and Tom Thumb visited Washington in 1847, they met with President James K. Polk and had this daguerreotype made by Marcus and Samuel Root.

National Portrait Gallery – Smithsonian Institution

associations in Europe, gave several of his songs and as a special mark of respect to the President, he danced the ‘Polk-A.’”<sup>29</sup>

On the day that Barnum and Tom Thumb visited President Polk at the Executive Mansion, the United States had just won the battle of Veracruz and American soldiers were marching toward Mexico City. When the war ended in 1848 the Rio Grande became recognized as an international border between Texas and Mexico, and 529,000 square miles of territory were added to the United States.

The Mexican-American War also created a national hero out of General Zachary Taylor.

In the late 1840s, both Taylor and clown Dan Rice were taking their place in American history, and while Rice often told stories of their friendship, it is unlikely that the pair had the kind of relationship that Rice claimed.

In his later years, Rice told many stories that were compiled into a book titled *The Life of Dan Rice*, which was published in 1901. The book contains many questionable tales, among them several episodes involving Zachary Taylor, including Rice’s fictional account of being nursed back to health by the General after contracting Yellow Fever in New Orleans in 1848.

Author David Carlyon, in his painstakingly researched

book *Dan Rice: The Most Famous Man You’ve Never Heard Of*, wrote that the clown’s “fertile imagination” created a number of questionable anecdotes about their friendship, including the tale that Rice had campaigned for Taylor in Louisiana, had been made an honorary colonel by the President and had even served as a pallbearer when Taylor died in 1850.

Perhaps the most often repeated – yet fabricated – story dates from Taylor’s 1848 campaign for president. For decades, writers have repeated the story of Taylor parading on Dan Rice’s bandwagon, which Rice claimed was the origin of the expression “jump on the bandwagon.” According to Carlyon, the story is false, and that phrase did not come into usage until the 1880s, more than 30 years after Zachary Taylor’s death.<sup>30</sup>



Dan Rice was both the model for Uncle Sam and a commentator on American politics throughout the 1800s.

Houghton Library, Harvard University

Rice also said he among the first to suggest that the war hero would be a strong candidate for president and claimed that he was a delegate at the Whig party’s convention in Philadelphia, an impossibility since Rice and his circus were traveling in Iowa at the time.<sup>31</sup>

Another story about Zachary Taylor and the early American circus does not involve Dan Rice, but rather a

black pony named Apollo, that was reportedly part of the President's inaugural parade. According to a prominent St. Louis doctor named Simon Pollak, he had purchased the trick pony from a stranded circus in the late 1830s and kept it at his home not far from the Mississippi River. Pollak said that in the summer of 1840 a group of girls from Nashville, including Zachary Taylor's daughter Betty, came to St. Louis on vacation, and while they were visiting, the 16-year-old became enamored with the pony.

According to Doctor Pollak, "I had vowed I should never sell [Apollo], but I had no place to keep him [after floods in 1844]. Miss Betty Taylor, daughter of the general, was very anxious to get him, and offered me a good price. But I could not sell him, so I gave him to her."

Doctor Pollak said that the First Daughter took excellent care of Apollo, and during the inauguration he "...made his triumphal entry into Washington along with Old Whitey, the general's war horse." Pollak said that the pony, which had once performed in a small circus ring in Missouri, lived out his final days in the presidential stables.<sup>32</sup>

Although Zachary Taylor was a popular president, his term was brief. Less than a year and a half after his inauguration Taylor died of a stomach ailment, possibly brought on by consuming large amounts of raw fruit and iced milk at a fundraiser for construction of the Washington Monument on July 4, 1850.

Following Taylor's death, Vice President Millard Fillmore assumed the office of Chief Executive, and it was Fillmore who next invited P. T. Barnum to the Executive Mansion, along with his latest attraction, singer Jenny Lind.

When Jenny Lind arrived in the United States on September 1, 1850, very few Americans had heard of her. In fact, Barnum himself had never heard her sing, but he did know that she could fill seats and command a premium for tickets. After Barnum promoted concerts in New York, Boston, Philadelphia and Baltimore, he and Jenny Lind traveled to Washington where they checked into the Willard Hotel, not far from the President's Mansion, on December 16.

Barnum's advance team was hard at work in Washington, and their efforts were paying off. "Jenny Lind appears to be written, printed and painted on everything," a local newspaper reported. "Jenny Lind seems to be incorporated into every sound. Jenny Lind is upon every lip and in every heart. People are counting the hours that separate her from them."<sup>33</sup>

Among those anticipating the arrival of "The Swedish Nightingale" was President Fillmore himself. On the morning after Barnum and Lind arrived in Washington, the President went to the Willard Hotel to meet the singer, only to find that she was out touring the city. Barnum related what happened when Jenny Lind returned to the hotel and found that the President had left his card for her.

"Come, we must call on the President immediately," the singer said. "He has called on me and that is equivalent to a



*Swedish soprano Jenny Lind was welcomed to Washington by President Millard Fillmore in 1850.*

National Portrait Gallery – Smithsonian Institution

command for me to go to his house."

Barnum assured her that despite her experience with European royalty, American presidents do not "command" citizens to respond, and it was not until the next day that Jenny Lind visited the Executive Mansion, accompanied by Barnum, her conductor Julius Benedict and her supporting baritone Giovanni Belletti.<sup>34</sup>

Both of Jenny Lind's Washington concerts were attended by the President and his family, along with all of the Cabinet and nearly every member of Congress, including Daniel Webster and Henry Clay.

The morning after the first concert, George Washington's great grandnephew, Colonel John Augustine Washington, welcomed the singer and Barnum to Mount Vernon where they were shown memorabilia associated with the first president. Prior leaving the estate Jenny Lind was given a book from the library with George Washington's signature on the front page, inscribed in his own hand.

Barnum related the trip to Mount Vernon in his autobiography *Struggles and Triumphs*, and said in closing, "Jenny Lind, I am sure, never forgot the pleasurable emotions of that day."<sup>35</sup>

Seven years later, it was a different kind of emotion that was gripping Washington as the city was packed with thou-



sands who had traveled great distances to witness the inauguration of James Buchanan. Dan Rice saw opportunity in the enormous crowds, and brought his circus to town, setting up his tent only a few blocks from the Capitol at 7<sup>th</sup> Street and Pennsylvania Avenue, N.E.

On the day before Buchanan's inauguration, Rice announced that he would be giving three performances, a matinee at 2:00 p.m., followed by an evening performance at 7:00 p.m. and a late show at 10:00 p.m.

Rice was keenly aware that accommodations in the city were scarce, so he opened up his big top as a temporary dormitory. Newspaper advertisements not only promoted the circus performance, but also announced that anyone who attended the 10 p.m. show would be given the opportunity to spend the night and sleep in the big top for an additional 50-cents, a welcome invitation for many travelers since the hotels and boarding houses in the city had been booked for days.<sup>36</sup>

The show that was presented that night featured the "talking horse" Excelsior and a menagerie that included a "mammoth black rhinoceros," with top billing given to the elephant named Lalla Rookh who Rice promised would "positively walk a tight rope!"<sup>37</sup>

Years later Rice said that after the inauguration he performed a comic song for 20,000 people about Buchanan and his new cabinet. The lengthy song ended with Rice assuming the role of the President's court jester, as he sang:

In olden times, Kings had their fools to while away  
their time,  
To please them, as I hope I've done here in mongrel  
rhyme;  
But our James Buchanan, these duties to discharge  
Has given Dan Rice the post of "Humorist at  
large."<sup>38</sup>

Although there is no record that Dan Rice ever met Buchanan, the title "The President's Court Jester" was one that the clown embraced and used throughout his career. James Buchanan only served one term as president, yet more than 25 years after he left office his memory was kept alive by Adam Forepaugh. In 1888, Forepaugh advertised that during his circus and wild west performance spectators would see the harness used by James Buchanan and his grandfather before him.<sup>39</sup> A reporter who toured the circus winter quarters in Philadelphia wrote that Forepaugh had bought the harnesses during an auction at President Buchanan's farm near Lancaster, Pennsylvania.<sup>40</sup>

Even before Buchanan took office the future of slavery was dividing the nation, but it was during the midterm election of 1858 that the public began lining up behind candidates who supported their personal views on the issue. In Illinois that summer an abolitionist lawyer named Abraham Lincoln challenged the incumbent Senator Stephen Douglas in a campaign that was focused on the future of slavery, and

which foreshadowed the presidential campaign of 1860.

During the Senate campaign both candidates used railroads to crisscross Illinois, exposing both Lincoln and Douglas to large crowds across the state. Because auditoriums were few and far between in the 1850s, circus tents offered both shelter and seating, and it was not long until an enterprising showman offered up his big top.

On September 4, 1858, Senator Douglas was scheduled to speak in Lincoln, Illinois on the same day that the Spalding & Rogers circus was to arrive. Joel Warner, the assistant manager of the circus, was aware of the interest the public had in the campaign and approached Douglas about using the big top for the speech. Douglas agreed, and according to Warner, when the matinee ended a large wagon with the circus bandstand on it was brought into the tent and for the next two hours the Senator known as "The Little Giant" spoke to a crowd of about 5,000 people.

Although the circus tent served its purpose that day, Douglas was mocked by newspapers across Illinois for his "circus act." Under the headline "Douglas In The Circus," the *Chicago Tribune* described the speech in the terms of a performance, asking whether "The Little Giant" made a better rider, acrobat or clown – finally describing him as a contortionist, since he came down differently on so many different issues.<sup>41</sup>

Five days later, Lincoln was scheduled to deliver a speech in Hillsboro, Illinois, again on the same day that Spalding & Rogers was scheduled to be in town. Although the local Republican committee had originally planned to use the tent for Lincoln's speech, the plan was scratched after the newspaper articles ridiculed Douglas for his "circus performance."

With the big top no longer an option, Lincoln's supporters in Hillsboro arranged for him to give his speech about a half-mile from the circus lot, but to reach the grove where "Honest Abe" would be speaking, thousands of people had to pass by the Spalding & Rogers lot. Since neither group wanted to compete for audience, the local Republicans promised the circus that their program would start at noon and finish by 2:00 p.m. to allow the assembled crowd to attend the matinee.

Spalding & Rogers assistant manager Joel Warner picks up the story from there:

"The speaking was delayed half-an-hour and I listened to Mr. Lincoln for a while, and then went to the tents to prepare for the crowd. A few minutes before two o'clock, the feature of our parade was drawn up to the grove, ready to lure the crowd to the tents when the speech ended. It was an immense cage containing a woman surrounded by a dozen large pythons and anacondas, drawn by forty horses driven by a single man (Major Derth), and the band was set up on top of the cage.



**THE CONSTITUTION.**  
**WEDNESDAY, OCTOBER 10, 1860.**

**For President,**  
**ABRAHAM LINCOLN.**  
 OF ILLINOIS.

**For Vice-President,**  
**HANNIBAL HAMLIN,**  
 OF MAINE.

**FOR ELECTORS.**


*At Large*—CHAUNCEY F. CLEAVELAND, Hampton  
 “ —ROGER S. BALDWIN of New Haven.

*1st Dist.*—SAMUEL AUSTIN of Suffield.

*2d “* —BENJAMIN DOUGLAS of Middletown.

*3d “* —AUGUSTUS BRANDEGEE of New London

*4th “* —FREDERICK WOOD of Bridgeport.



**THE DOUBLE**  
**Mammoth Circus and**  
**MENAGERIE**  
 of G. F. BAILEY & CO.'S,  
 (Late A. Turner's,) will exhibit in  
**MIDDLETOWN,**  
**ON FRIDAY, October 19th,**

This company is the oldest, most complete and only combined establishment now travelling. The animals are of the largest specimens of LIONS, TIGERS, LEOPARDS, PANTHERS, APES, HYENAS, BEARS, MONKEYS, &c.

The Company has a selection of Equestrians and Acrobats from the cities of NEW YORK, LONDON and PARIS, entirely new and pleasing, giving more sports greater variety of performances, more astonishing tricks, funnier Clowns and the largest company that ever visited this State, giving twenty different performances in the arena each exhibition. The Animals and Circus will be exhibited under one pavilion with ample room. Seats all around the tent. Nothing shall be wanted to make this an agreeable and satisfactory entertainment.

Doors open at 1½ and 7, p. m. Commence at 2 and 7 o'clock, p. m. Admission 25 cents.

2w89 C. H. FARNSWORTH, Agent.

By 1860, newspaper display advertising was an effective way to influence voters and draw an audience. This campaign ad for Lincoln was coincidentally placed above the G. F. Bailey & Co. circus advertisement.

Circus World Museum

“Two o'clock came and Mr. Lincoln seemed no nearer his conclusion than when he began.

“I must have the crowd,' I demanded of the master of ceremonies

“Oh, give us a few more minutes,' he begged.

“I'll give you ten.”

“Watch in hand, I waited. When the time was up, the rail-splitter was still rending the air with his eloquence. Evidently, he was just becoming seriously and earnestly interested in his subject. If our show was to get any of these people, it must get them before sundown.

“I stepped to the road and waved my hand. The woman shook up the serpents. The band struck up a lively air. The procession moved and within minutes only the committee and a few personal friends were left to hear the eloquent peroration for which Abe Lincoln was famous.

“Our tents were not half large enough for the crowd that had left Lincoln's speech to attend the circus.”<sup>42</sup>

Over the next two months debates were held in five towns in Illinois, including Quincy where seating from the Levi J. North Circus was used to accommodate the crowd. Yet despite Lincoln's “eloquent peroration,” on election day in 1858, Stephen A. Douglas defeated Abraham Lincoln and continued to represent Illinois in the United States Senate.

Two years later a rematch was shaping up between Lincoln and Douglas, however the prize was now the Presidency. On May 9, 1860, the Republican state nominating convention was held in the central Illinois town of Decatur, and again a circus big top was used to shelter the crowd. According to historian Stuart Thayer, a special building had been constructed for the convention, however there was not enough money for a roof, so the contractor borrowed a circus tent-top and sidewall to use as a temporary roof. Thayer believed that the canvas was provided by the Great Van Amburgh Show, “since no other circus was in Illinois at the time.” The Republican state convention was held on May 9, 1860, and Van Amburgh's route included Springfield, May 1, Bloomington, May 5 and LaSalle, May 11.<sup>43</sup>

The delegates to the Illinois state convention nominated Lincoln, and after he was chosen as the party's presidential candidate in 1860, he went on to defeat his Democratic opponent, Senator Stephen A. Douglas, and win the Presidency.

From the moment he took office Lincoln faced many challenges, and as the Union army was experiencing setbacks in the fall of 1862 the President took a break from the bleak war news to invite P. T. Barnum to the Executive Mansion, where he was buoyed by the antics of “Commodore Nutt,” a 29-inch tall attraction who barely reached the President's knee.<sup>44</sup>

Barnum recalled what happened that day:

“I received an invitation from President Lincoln to call at the White House with my little friend. Arriving at the appointed hour, I was informed that the President was in a special Cabinet meeting, but that he had left word if I called to be shown in with the Commodore. These were dark days in the rebellion, and I felt that my visit, if not ill timed, must at



all be brief.

"When we were admitted, Mr. Lincoln received us cordially, and introduced us to the members of the Cabinet. When Mr. Salmon Chase, was introduced as the Secretary of the Treasury, the little Commodore remarked 'I suppose you are the gentleman who is spending so much of Uncle Sam's money?'

"No indeed,' said Secretary of War Stanton, very promptly: 'I am the one spending the money!'

"Well,' said Commodore Nutt, 'it is in a good cause anyhow, and I guess it will come out all right.'"

"His remark created much amusement. Mr. Lincoln then bent down his long, lank body, and taking Nutt by the hand said, 'Commodore, permit me to give you a parting word of advice. When you are in command of your fleet, if you find yourself in danger of being taken prisoner, I advise you to wade ashore.'

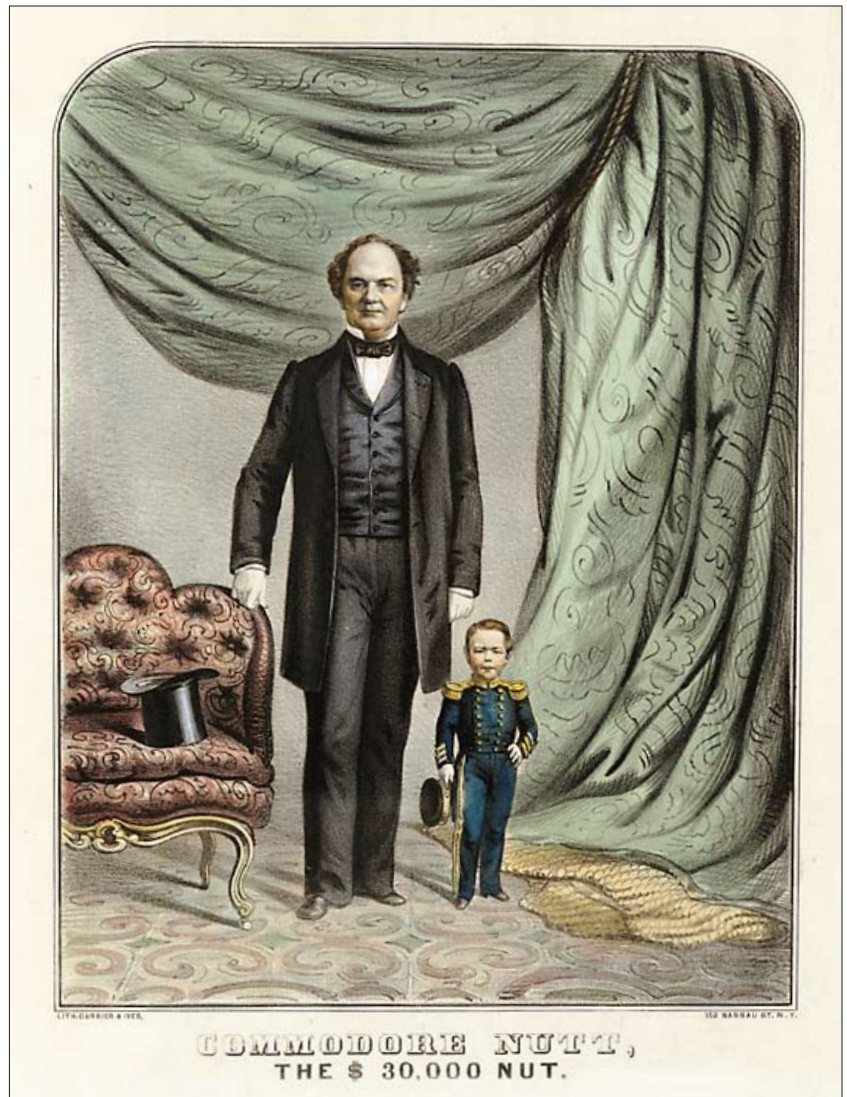
"The commodore found the laugh was against him, but placing himself at the side of the President, and gradually raising his eyes up the whole length of Mr. Lincoln's long legs he replied, 'I guess, Mr. President you could do that better than I could.'"<sup>45</sup>

Under the management of P. T. Barnum, George Washington Morrison Nutt became almost as famous as General Tom Thumb, and on the day that he was introduced to President Lincoln, he had only been touring with Barnum for a few months. Nutt, along with Tom Thumb, were both headliners that day at Barnum's American Circus and Museum which was set up adjacent to the United States Capitol building.

Although Nutt was Barnum's rising star in the autumn of 1862, General Tom Thumb was still a major attraction at the circus,<sup>46</sup> and only four-months later the General would also return to the Presidential Mansion.

After 15 years of exhibiting Tom Thumb, Barnum was looking for something new, and he found it in Lavinia Warren. After hearing of a small young woman who lived in Middleboro, Massachusetts, Barnum met Warren, and said later that he found her to be "a most intelligent and refined young lady, well-educated and accomplished, beautiful and perfectly developed woman in miniature." The two were engaged on the same night that they met.<sup>47</sup>

Charles Stratton and Lavinia Warren were married at New York's Grace Church on February 10, 1863 and the press quickly renamed them Mr. and Mrs. Tom Thumb. The newlyweds immediately began their honeymoon, which



*P. T. Barnum and his newest attraction "Commodore Nutt" visited Abraham Lincoln during the middle of a Cabinet meeting.*

The Museum of the City of New York

took them to Washington where they were welcomed to the Executive Mansion by President and Mrs. Lincoln on February 13.

The presidential reception for the couple was one of the first public events that the Lincolns hosted following a year-long mourning period for their son Willie. When describing the day later, Lavinia said "the President took our hands and led us to the sofa, lifting the General up and placed him at his left hand, while Mrs. Lincoln did the same for me, placing me at her right. Tad, the favorite son, stood beside his mother and gazing at me whispered, 'Mother if you were a little woman like Mrs. Stratton you would look just like her.'"<sup>48</sup> Another attendee described the scene: "With profound respect they looked up, up, to [Mr. Lincoln's] kindly face. It was pleasant to see their tall host bend, and bend, to take their little hands in his great palm, holding hers as though it were a robin's egg, and he were afraid of breaking it."<sup>49</sup>



*In February 1863, Mr. and Mrs. Tom Thumb attended a reception hosted by Abraham Lincoln and his wife. They arrived on the circular stone pathway seen in this 1860 view of the north side of the Executive Mansion.*

Library of Congress, Washington, D.C.

The next day, Mrs. Lincoln held her regular Saturday afternoon reception, and was surprised that the crowd was much larger than usual. Mrs. Lincoln later said she suspected that the public had visited the President's House in hopes of also seeing Mr. and Mrs. Tom Thumb.

As the Civil War began to take its toll on both President Lincoln and the nation, there were still traveling circuses in both the north and the south, performing even as the war raged around them. One notable show opened in the Union-occupied city of Nashville November 14, 1864, only a month before one of the largest battles in the western theater.

The circus that was presented in the days leading up to the Battle of Nashville was made up of three troupes, Lake & Company's Mammoth Circus, Robinson & Howe's Railroad Circus and Howes & Norton's Champion Circus. The three shows had combined for the one exhibition that would run for four weeks.

As the circus delivered two performances each day, the *Nashville Union* reported that many of the union troops that were gathering in the city were using their down time to attend the show. "The soldiers patronize the circus so much that part of the tent looks like a blueberry patch," the newspaper reported.<sup>50</sup>

Some 70,000 soldiers were being assembled that November, including a cavalry made up of 12,000 mounted troops. Unfortunately, 3,000 of them had not yet been assigned horses. On December 6, General Grant was advised that as soon as the cavalry had sufficient mounts, the battle could begin, but to do so all of the civilian horses in Nash-

ville would have to be seized.

On December 7, the Union army commandeered 18 horses from the circus, paying their owners \$1,800, a small amount considering their value as trained performers.<sup>51</sup>

The next day the *Nashville Union* and the *Nashville Daily Press* both reported the confiscation of the circus animals but assured the public that the show would go on as scheduled.

According to John Glenroy, a performer with the troupe, show owner Frank Howes complained to the commanding general, who refused to return the horses. At that point, Howes reached out to Andrew Johnson, the vice-president-elect who was also the military Governor of Tennessee. Glenroy said that Johnson then communicated with President Lincoln who suggested that the circus horses could be released if the show could find substitutes. It took considerable effort to find 18 horses as the city was preparing for battle, but Howes & Norton had their horses returned even before they had rounded up replacements.<sup>52</sup>

A week later, the Battle of Nashville began, and the circus didn't miss a performance. Despite the booming cannons and uncertainty of the battle, the big top was jammed, and the equestrian acts were presented as advertised.<sup>53</sup>

It was during the Civil War that Dan Rice first began considering politics, and as a Democrat he was a harsh and frequent critic of Lincoln. As a northerner with Southern sympathies, he was not afraid to capitalize on the assassination of the President by adding an attraction that was described in the diary of a schoolteacher who attended the Dan Rice Circus in Bellefontaine, Ohio less than four months after Lincoln was murdered.

"I saw elephants, lions, bear, wildcat, yak, camels, buffalo, monkey, leopard, kangaroo and a blind horse which was taught to understand the English language. I saw a representation of the assassination of Lincoln and also of Secretary Seward. It was quite horrible."<sup>54</sup>

With Andrew Johnson, a Democrat, now in the President's House, Rice announced in 1866 that he was running for Congress from the state of Pennsylvania. Less than two months before the election, President Johnson made a campaign trip to Erie and Rice hoped to get his endorsement.

As the crowd waited for the presidential train to arrive, the Governor of Pennsylvania and Dan Rice both gave speeches, and while the *Erie Dispatch* reported that most of Rice's remarks were "irrelevant [sic] to the occasion and subject," he did make few political jokes, and said that his experience training comic mules would give him an advantage in handling "the jackasses of Congress." According to the *Dispatch* Rice's speech was "the most enjoyable portion of the 'show'"<sup>55</sup>

Despite the Andrew Johnson endorsement, the President's coattails were not long enough, and Dan Rice dropped



out of the race, returning to the circus ring in 1867.

As for Johnson himself, his assistant, Mayor Benjamin Truman recalled that “he had been to a few circuses and minstrel shows, and he liked them,” however, the President was strictly business and Truman could never persuade him to go to the theatre in either Nashville or Washington.<sup>56</sup>

There may have been another reason why Andrew Johnson did not participate in the entertainment options that were available in Washington, at least in the spring of 1868. On March 30, the very same day that Dan Rice set up his tents on Sixth Street just south of Pennsylvania Avenue, Johnson’s impeachment trial began in the Senate.

Since Rice was performing in Washington during the impeachment trial, it is likely he joked about it, however there is no record of exactly what he said. Nevertheless, the newspapers promised that he would POSITIVELY APPEAR in his role as “The American Humorist,” along with “a mammoth menagerie, a school of educated animals and a model circus.”<sup>57</sup>

The newspapers also reported that at the conclusion of the Washington engagement Rice would retire to private life, never to return to the capital city, “unless the people, in their sovereign pleasure shall please to call him from his retirement to assume, on the 4th of March next [Inauguration Day] the duties of the President of the United States.”<sup>58</sup>

It wasn’t Dan Rice, but rather Ulysses S. Grant who took the Oath of Office as America’s 18<sup>th</sup> President on March 4, 1869, and for many he possessed a great number of the same leadership qualities of another wartime general, George Washington. And, in addition to their success on the battlefield both were exceptional horsemen.

For Grant it may have begun when a small circus and menagerie came to town while he was still a toddler. According to a family story, young Ulysses was fascinated by a trained pony and when the ringmaster invited members of the audience to ride the animal the boy begged his father until he got his way. After he was lifted on the horses back, Ulysses circled the ring several times while being held by an adult.<sup>59</sup>

Anytime a circus would come near Grant’s hometown of Point Pleasant, Ohio, he would attend the show, and whenever the ringmaster asked for a volunteer to ride a pony, he would raise his hand. According to his biographers, on one of those occasions the circus had a pony that was “trained to go around the ring like lightning,” with the idea of ultimately throwing the boy.

At that performance young Ulysses mounted the pony and as it picked up speed a monkey was brought out which jumped on the boy’s back. According to the Grant-family lore, even with several turns around the ring Ulysses never lost control, until finally the ringmaster gave up and conceded that he had “finally come across a boy that the pony and monkey could not throw.”<sup>60</sup>

Although Grant had a distinguished career as a soldier

and president, by 1884 he had depleted most of his savings through bad investments, and to raise cash he borrowed \$150,000 from businessman William Henry Vanderbilt, using his war trophies and presidential memorabilia as collateral.

Upon learning this P. T. Barnum wrote the following letter to Grant:

*New York, January 12, 1885*

*To General U. S. Grant, twice President of the United States, etc.:*

*Honored Sir:*

*The whole world honors and respects you. All are anxious that you should live happy and free from care. While they admire your manliness in declining the large sum recently tendered you by friends, they still desire to see you achieve financial independence in an honorable manner. Of the unique and valuable trophies with which you have been honored, we all have read, and all have a laudable desire to see these evidences of love and respect bestowed upon you by monarchs, princes and people throughout the globe. While you would confer a great and enduring favor on your fellow men and women by permitting them to see these trophies you could also remove existing embarrassments in a most satisfactory and honorable manner. I will give you one hundred thousand dollars cash, besides a portion of the profits, if I may be permitted to exhibit these relics to a grateful and appreciative public and I will give satisfactory bonds of half a million dollars for their safe keeping and return.*

After he received the letter, Grant invited Barnum to his home on East 66<sup>th</sup> Street in Manhattan, and as they began talking, Grant told Barnum that he no longer had control of the memorabilia and that it was in the possession of Vanderbilt who had promised that it would be displayed in Washington after the President died.

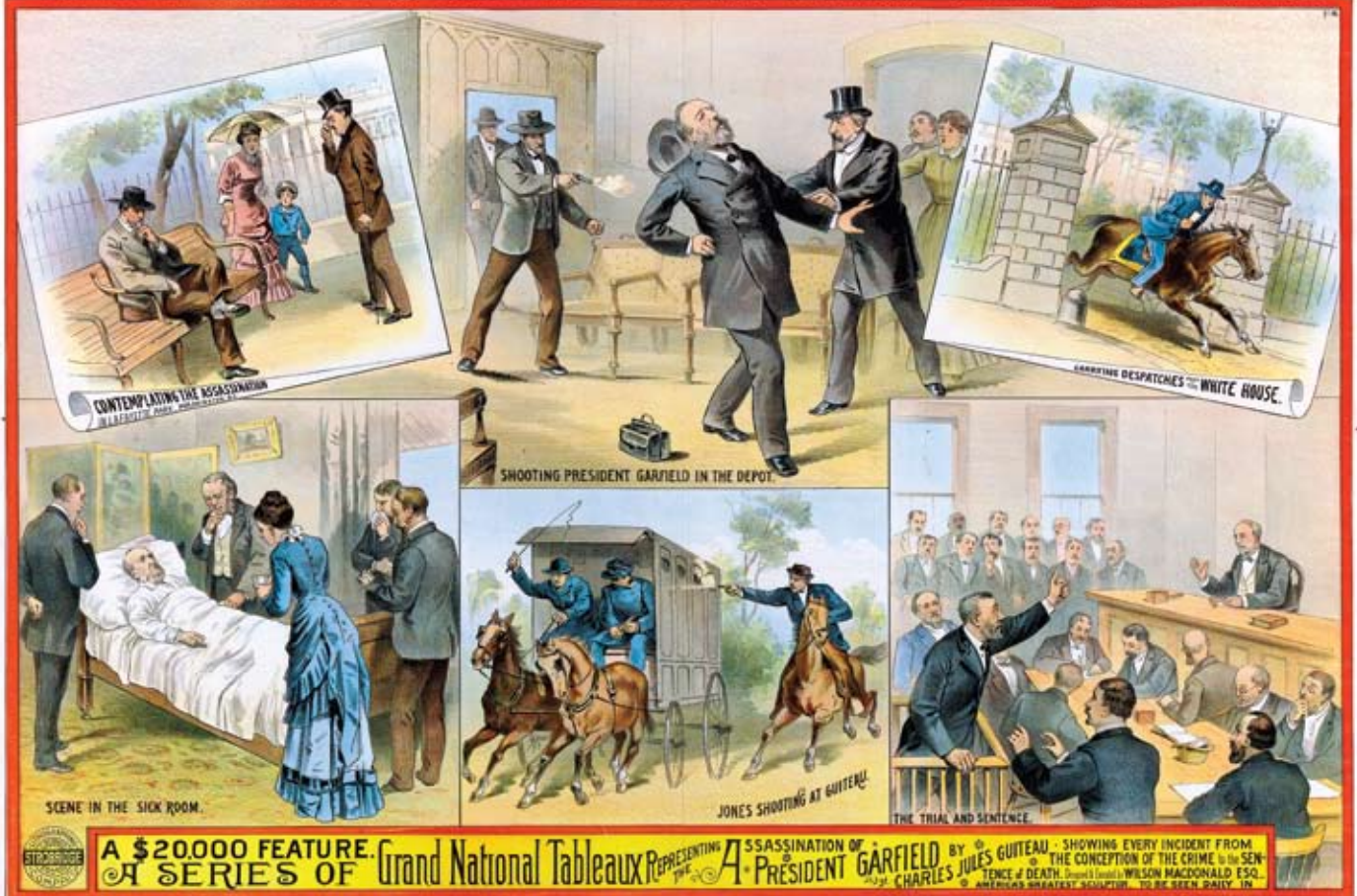
“After all, Mr. Barnum,” he said, “under the present arrangements, everybody who visits Washington will see them.”

Barnum replied, “Yes, General, but millions who will never visit Washington will regret that I had never brought these historical relics to where they could see them.” After Grant died in 1885 the artifacts were given to the Smithsonian Institution, but Barnum said that he always regretted that he never was able to take President Grant’s trophies on tour.<sup>61</sup>

It was 12 years from the time Grant died until his tomb was dedicated in the Morningside Heights neighborhood of Manhattan on what would have been the President’s 75<sup>th</sup> birthday, April 27, 1897. A huge crowd was on hand for the ceremony including President William McKinley and Wil-

# W.C. COUP'S NEW UNITED MONSTER SHOWS.

## THREE CIRCUSES IN ONE GREAT RING. COMBINED WITH



# THE GREAT WORLD'S FAIR.

## EXCURSION TRAINS ON ALL RAILROADS TO THESE GREAT SHOWS.

W. C. Coup created a special sideshow following the assassination of James Garfield. The six vignettes depicted various scenes associated with the murder of the President.

Cincinnati Art Museum

liam F. Cody whose Buffalo Bill's Wild West was showing at Madison Square Garden. It was Cody, along with General Grenville Dodge and Chief Joseph of the Nez Perce tribe, who had been chosen to lead the procession.<sup>62</sup>

Another Civil War general who invited Barnum to the Executive Mansion was James Garfield, who reached out to Barnum only a month after he took office, when his *Greatest Show on Earth* and *The Great London Circus* was in Washington in the spring of 1881.

On April 7, Barnum called on President Garfield "to tell him what a great man he was."<sup>63</sup> In response, Garfield told Barnum, "Your show is a national kindergarten. You are the Kris Kringle of America. Of course I'll go and take my family to your show. I always go."<sup>64</sup> The quote was immediately added to newly designed lithographs and newspaper advertising, but the presidential endorsement was short-lived as Garfield was assassinated by Charles Guiteau on September 19 while the circus was in St. Louis.

Just as Dan Rice had created a special sideshow follow-

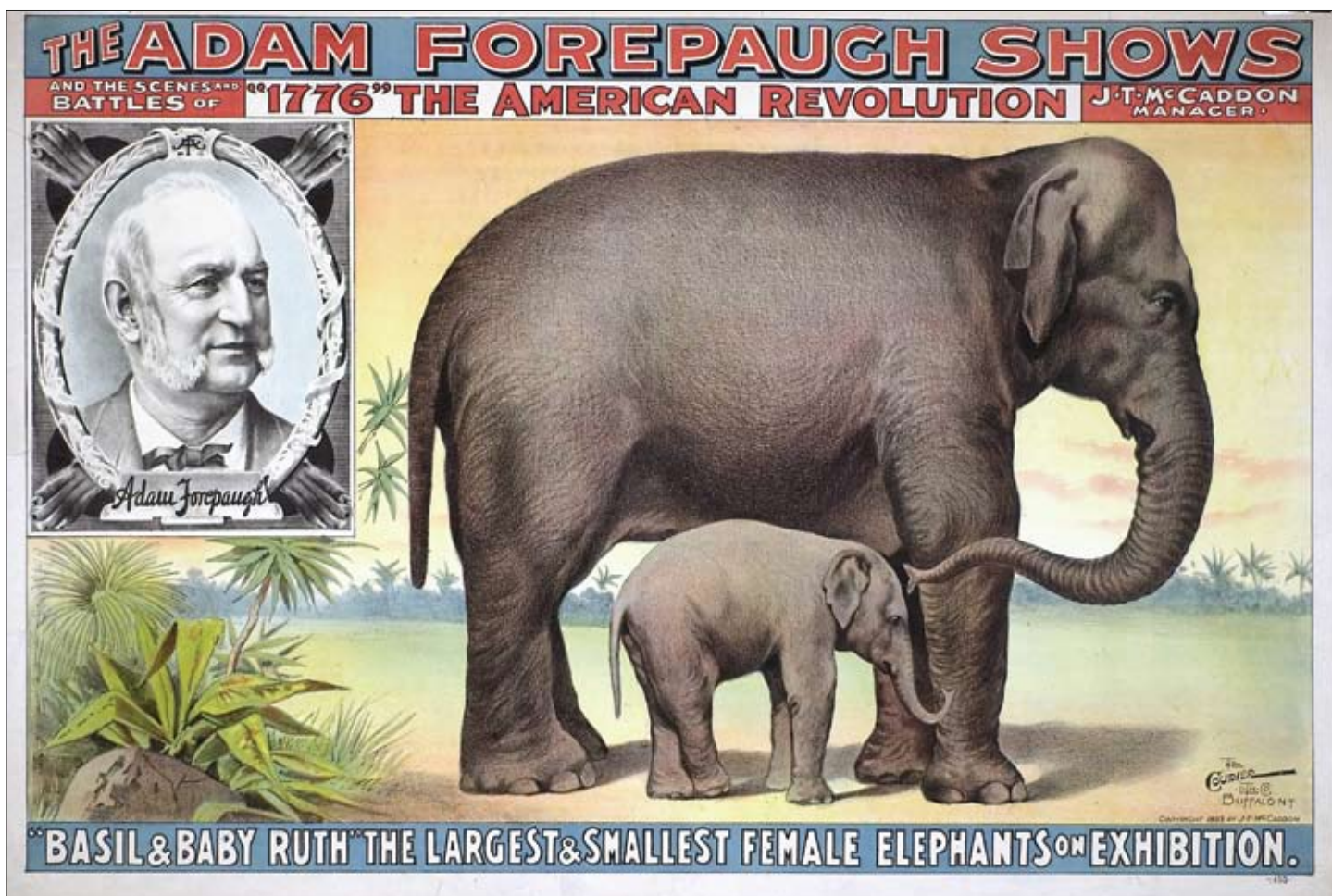
ing the assassination of Lincoln, W. C. Coup capitalized on the interest in Guiteau's trial and execution by adding an attraction to the circus, which traced the plot from the time the killer first planned the murder to his execution.

The sideshow consisted of six scenes which featured wax figures of Garfield, Guiteau and others that were created by a sculptor named J. Wilson Alexander MacDonald. Newspapers reported that MacDonald had visited Guiteau in jail and made casts of his head, took measurements of his body, and just in time for the start of the 1882 season "completed a facsimile of the miserable coward."<sup>65</sup>

To add realism to the display circus manager Harry McCartney paid Guiteau \$350 for the two suits that he had worn at the time of the assassination and during the trial.<sup>66</sup> Coup told newspapers that all totaled the attraction "cost me ten times more than any feature in any other show on the continent."<sup>67</sup>

Despite the expense, which included a special lithograph produced by Strobridge, the sideshow was short-lived





*"Baby Ruth" Cleveland was a national sensation after her birth in 1891, and both Adam Forepaugh and Barnum & Bailey had elephants in their menageries named after Grover Cleveland's daughter.* University of Pennsylvania, Van Pelt-Dietrich Library Center

as most of the exhibit was destroyed in a train wreck near Cairo, Illinois on August 20, 1882.<sup>68</sup> The wreck, along with other financial problems forced the circus into bankruptcy and a sheriff's sale was held in Detroit September 16. Although \$11,000 was raised by the auction, the two suits that had belonged to Guiteau were described as having "no value."<sup>69</sup>

Grover Cleveland is best remembered today as the only Chief Executive to serve two non-consecutive terms, elected as both the 22<sup>nd</sup> and the 24<sup>th</sup> President, but during the years he was in office Americans were intrigued by his personal life. At the time of his inauguration, Cleveland was a 47-year-old bachelor, and when he married 21-year-old Frances Folsom at the President's House in 1886 it was front-page news for weeks.

It should come as no surprise that when the Cleveland's daughter Ruth was born shortly after the end of his first term that she would become a media sensation. The activities of "Baby Ruth" Cleveland were tracked daily in the newspapers and it didn't take long for J. T. McCaddon, owner of the Adam Forepaugh Shows, to seize the promotional opportunity. At about the time that Baby Ruth was born McCaddon acquired a newborn elephant and for the 1892 season it was

named after the President's infant daughter.

When the Forepaugh circus went on the road in 1892, "Baby Ruth and Basil" were promoted as being the "largest and smallest female elephants in the world." Although the young elephant did not parade, it was clearly one of the major attractions for those who visited the circus. When the Forepaugh show was in St. Louis, Baby Ruth was described as the darling of the menagerie, "she commands a vast amount of attention," a reporter wrote, "and the amount of bonbons and peanuts presented to her daily would start a good sized store."<sup>70</sup> A writer in Detroit went on to describe Baby Ruth "a mite of an elephant who would make a nice parlor pet for some lady who is tired of her poodle."<sup>71</sup>

Whether it was Baby Ruth Cleveland, or the children of John and Jacqueline Kennedy, the public has always been fascinated by presidential families, and when Benjamin Harrison took office in 1889, his daughter Mary Harrison McKee along with her husband and two children also took up residency at the Executive Mansion.

Harrison had only been in office a little over two months when Barnum & Bailey visited Washington, and despite rainy weather on May 15, 1890, the President was determined to take his two-year old grandson, Benjamin Harrison McKee

to see *The Greatest Show on Earth*.

According to the *Evening Star*, the large crowd that was on the showgrounds that morning was surprised by the arrival of the presidential party and even more astonished when Grandpa Harrison stepped from the closed carriage and lifted Baby Benjamin out. The front-door attendants then lifted the chains as the President and his family entered the menagerie for a private viewing of the animals.

Although it had rained overnight, the menagerie floor had been covered with a liberal amount of sawdust which had soaked up “a lake of mud and water.” With dry ground beneath them, the First Family began their tour of the menagerie without stepping into puddles.

A reporter who accompanied the President said Baby Benjamin “did not make any remarks” but he did enjoy the giraffe and zebras. The toddler was given peanuts to feed an elephant, and when someone suggested that the baby might want to ride an elephant, the First Lady quickly declined the invitation, though she did allow him to be put on a pony.

As the group proceeded past the cage wagons, they glanced into the big top and saw that the hippodrome track was very muddy. Despite assurances that the tent would be dry for the performance, the President and First Lady decided that Baby Benjamin’s introduction to the circus would stop at the menagerie. The party then left the showgrounds to return to the President’s House, the entire visit only lasting about a half-hour.<sup>72</sup>

By the time that Grover Cleveland returned to Washington for his second term in 1893, his wife Frances had given birth to a second daughter named Esther and when Barnum & Bailey arrived for its annual Washington engagement in 1894, not only did the Cleveland children visit the showgrounds, but the President also brought part of the circus to the Executive Mansion.

One of the major attractions of the Barnum & Bailey circus in 1894 was the “Ethnological Congress,” a display that featured individuals and races from around the world, presented in exotic settings. On May 7, the day that the show arrived in Washington from Philadelphia, several members of the “Congress” were invited by President Cleveland to the

President’s House, “where they were received by the President and family.”

The next day two-year-old Baby Ruth and her infant sister Esther went to the circus lot at North Capitol and M Street, N.W., and like Baby Benjamin a few years earlier, the presidential party was treated to a private tour of the menagerie. Among the animals that caught the attention of the Cleveland family was a small elephant not surprisingly named “Baby Ruth,” the same gimmick that the Forepaugh Shows was using to capitalize on the popularity of the First Daughter.<sup>73</sup>

The presidential campaign of 1896 was unique in that the Republican candidate, William McKinley did not travel across the country giving speeches as his opponent William



*Shortly before the election of 1896, the Barnum & Bailey parade stopped in front of William McKinley’s home in Canton, Ohio so that performers could present him with a ceremonial American flag.*

Circus World Museum

Jennings Bryant did, but rather stayed at his home in Canton, Ohio, meeting supporters on his front porch. From the moment he was nominated in June until Election Day in November, McKinley remained in Canton, available to meet the public every day except Sunday.

About a month before Election Day Barnum & Bailey arrived in Canton, where the parade was extended beyond its usual route in order to pass the McKinley home. As the bandwagon, cages and elephants passed by, Mr. and Mrs. McKinley along with a group of friends watched from the front porch. The performers were all dressed in red, white and blue costumes, and when the procession stopped in front of his house the employees of the circus presented the nominee with a large silk flag, which he accepted “with an



appropriate address.”<sup>74</sup>

McKinley was elected in 1896, and during his re-election campaign four years later the President was back in Canton on summer vacation when the Pawnee Bill Wild West Show visited the town. According to the 1900 Route Book, McKinley welcomed Pawnee Bill (Gordon William Lillie), to his home along with a group of others from the show including the chiefs of four Indian Tribes.<sup>75 76</sup>

After serving his first term, McKinley chose Theodore Roosevelt as his running mate in 1900 capitalizing on his exploits during the Spanish American War where he led his 1<sup>st</sup> United States Volunteer Cavalry into battle in Cuba. The detachment of 1000 men had been nicknamed “The Roosevelt Rough Riders” because of their comparison to “Buffalo Bill’s Wild West and Congress of Rough Riders of the World.”

In an ironic case of art imitating life, during the 1900 season both Cody and his competitor Pawnee Bill capitalized on Roosevelt’s fame during their performances by reenacting The Battle of San Juan Hill, with both shows using performers who claimed to be a part of the units that Roosevelt had led in Cuba.

At least some of those performing with Buffalo Bill

that season were actual veterans of the war as indicated by an event that happened during a whistle-stop tour that Roosevelt was making through Kansas less than two months before Election Day.

As Roosevelt’s train arrived at the depot in Junction City, a huge crowd was on hand to greet him, but unlike his other campaign stops, this group included soldiers and Indians dressed in full regalia. The Buffalo Bill Wild West was in town on the same day that Teddy Roosevelt was scheduled to make a campaign speech.

When the train stopped, Cody – dressed like a frontiersman – walked to the rear of the train and was warmly greeted by Roosevelt. Governor Roosevelt then looked around the group of performers and recognized a dozen or more soldiers who had been in his regiment. As Roosevelt concluded his stump speech, he then introduced Cody who began a speech of his own:

“Ladies and Gentlemen: Governor Roosevelt is the American cyclone and I don’t wonder that some of taken to their cellars. The Wild West is here not to make political speeches. The ticket the Governor



Theodore Roosevelt’s popularity during the Spanish-American War led to several troupes of Rough Riders performing with circuses and wild west shows. This Courier Co. lithograph dates from 1903.

The Ringling Museum, Tibbals Circus Collection



represents is already elected and all they have got to do is to show up and take the pot. I have with me members of Colonel Roosevelt's regiment at San Juan Hill. I have others who belonged to the Sixth and the Tenth cavalry...."

As Cody began rambling, the steam whistle blew and Governor Roosevelt's train pulled out of the station cutting Buffalo Bill's speech short, "much to the regret of Governor Roosevelt who seemed to enjoy the incident," according to a reporter on the scene.<sup>77</sup>

The McKinley/Roosevelt ticket was elected on November 6, 1900, yet only six months into the new administration McKinley was assassinated, shot by an anarchist while attending the World's Fair in Buffalo, New York.

In the days that followed the nation went into a period of mourning, and circuses also paid their respects. Among the shows that canceled performances on the day of the McKinley's funeral were John Robinson's Ten Big Shows which was touring in Bridgeport, Alabama.<sup>78</sup> The Adam Forepaugh and Sells Bros. Circus with its hundreds of horses and men along with scores of elephants, cages and animals, spent the day on an Illinois Central sidetrack near Webster City, Iowa. According to the show, the layoff cost \$5,000.<sup>79</sup>

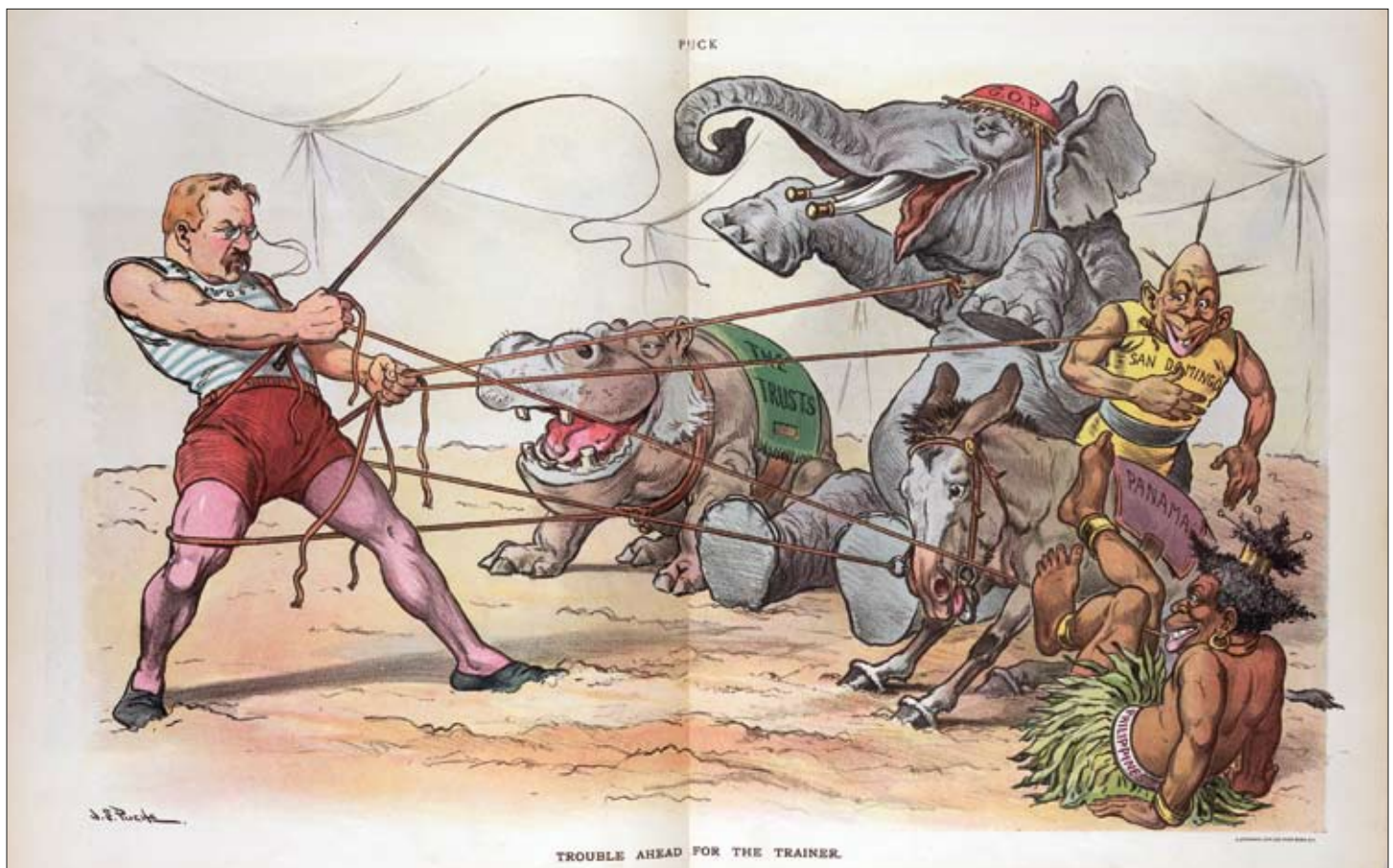
When Theodore Roosevelt took office following the as-

sassination of McKinley, he became the youngest president ever at the age of 42. He also brought six children to the White House, all under the age of 15.

On May 9, 1904, two of President Roosevelt's children, along with members of the White House staff, were among an enormous audience estimated at about 14,000 when Barnum & Bailey opened a two-day stand on a circus lot at 15<sup>th</sup> and H Streets, N.E.

Although the billing promised sensational features, the most exciting thing for most of those in attendance that day did not happen in the circus ring, as just before the Volo's "Loop the Gap" act, a strong wind blew through the big top and according to a newspaper report "for a moment it looked as though a panic was imminent as crowds surged through the doorways."<sup>80</sup>

President Roosevelt's children, Ethel and Archie, accompanied by White House staff, were seated in a box directly in the center of the big top, and as heavy rain began pelting the canvas, they were surrounded by hundreds of spectators trying to get out of the tent. Despite the frantic crowd, those in the VIP box kept their heads, and an observer reported that the Roosevelt children seemed to be among those who had showed the least amount of fear. An eyewitness said that as the quarter-poles were lifted in the air, the center poles began to buckle, yet they withstood the strain as circus man-



The humor magazine Puck depicted Theodore Roosevelt as an animal trainer trying to tame the issues challenging his presidency in 1905.

Library of Congress, Washington, D.C.



agement and police calmed the crowd.<sup>81</sup>

It was not rain and wind, but rather Washington's stifling heat that prompted the Roosevelts to relocate each summer to their home in Oyster Bay, New York where the President would continue to conduct official business. However, on August 1, 1906, the newspapers reported that for that one day "all business was suspended" because the circus was in town, and as a result, it was "Oyster Bay's day off."<sup>82</sup>

The show that was visiting the Long Island Community was Frank A. Robbins Circus and the President's family attended the matinee. After the performance, Roosevelt personally thanked Frank Robbins "and pronounced the circus as one of the best... and left well pleased with the show."<sup>83</sup>

When Theodore Roosevelt decided not to run for reelection in 1908, his Vice President William Howard Taft became the Republican candidate in a race that pitted him against William Jennings Bryan, the same candidate who the Democrats had also nominated in 1896 and 1900. For the clowns on the Ringling Bros. circus it didn't matter who the candidate was, and during the 1908 campaign many politicians were lampooned during a walkaround that included Dave Clark impersonating a toothy President Roosevelt carrying a "big stick" and clown Raymond Worth made up to look like Bryan.<sup>84</sup>

Even after Taft was elected in 1909, Teddy Roosevelt was still a target for the Ringling clowns. Roosevelt spent much of his first year out of office on safari in what is now Kenya and Uganda, collecting thousands of specimens for the Smithsonian Institution. The safari was parodied that season by "The Children's Favorite Clown," George Hartzell, who impersonated Roosevelt on his African adventure.<sup>85</sup>

In 1914 the big political controversy was whether to give women the right to vote, and when President Woodrow Wil-

son attended Barnum & Bailey in Washington that spring he "laughed as heartily as anybody..." especially at a group of clowns dressed as suffragette who marched behind a banner that read, "We Can't Vote and Why Should We?"<sup>86</sup>

President Wilson was a passionate circus fan, attending year after year, and staying through the Wild West aftershow.



*Woodrow Wilson signaled that he would be running for reelection by "throwing his hat in the ring" while attending Barnum & Bailey in 1916.*

Library of Congress, Washington, D.C.

In 1914 he entered the big top through the dressing rooms, and according to news reports he attracted so little attention that "few of the thousands in the audience knew that they had almost rubbed elbows with the President."<sup>87</sup>

Yet if Woodrow Wilson was practically anonymous to the circus crowd in 1914, that was not the case two years later as he was gearing up for his reelection campaign. On May 8, 1916, newspapers in Washington hinted that the President would be attending Barnum & Bailey's opening night performance.

That night, with thousands already in their seats, the President's limousine pulled up to the performer's entrance. When the President and First Lady entered the tent, the crowd gave them a standing ovation as they walked directly across the arena to their box. Just as the President entered the center ring "where the calcium light was strongest," he flashed a grin and made a motion as if to throw his hat into the ring. The crowd realized the significance of the gesture as a wave of laughter and cheering swept the tent.<sup>88</sup>

The support that Wilson experienced from the circus audience in 1916 foreshadowed his reelection that November, and by the time that the Ringling Bros. circus arrived in Washington in May of 1917, he was two months into his second term. After a parade that passed the White House on the morning of May 17, President Wilson and his daughter attended the evening performance, arriving early and staying late.

The following year Barnum & Bailey was back in Wash-

ington, but the nation was now at war, and as the President and the First Lady were escorted to their box, it appeared that the party must have forgotten about the war tax that had been imposed on ticket to all entertainment events. According to newspaper dispatches, the following exchange occurred between the President and an usher:

“Beg pardon, Mr. President, but I will have to collect the war tax from you.”

“How much?” asked the President.

“Fifteen cents,” said the circus man.

“Keep the change,” said the President, handing the circus man either a quarter or half dollar.

“I’m not permitted,” said the usher and he handed back the change. Whereupon the President pocketed it and went back to eating peanuts.<sup>89</sup>

The 1918 edition of the Barnum & Bailey *Greatest Show on Earth* was the last circus that President Wilson attended as he was in France for the Paris Peace Conference when the Ringling Bros. and Barnum & Bailey “Super Circus” arrived in Washington in 1919. Later that year Wilson suffered a severe stroke and was incapacitated for the remainder of his presidency.

Although he was not well enough to attend the circus in 1920, circus management arranged to route the parade past the White House, and as the clown band passed by it struck up “Stars and Stripes Forever,” and the President raised his hat to acknowledge them.<sup>90</sup>

In 1921, Warren Harding was the new President. Although he never attended Ringling Bros. and Barnum & Bailey, his friendship with John Ringling was forged during the 1920 campaign when Ringling had entertained Harding on his private railroad coach named Jomar.<sup>91</sup> Harding did invite Ringling to the White House for lunch when the circus was in Washington in both 1921 and 1922, at the same time that the circus king was trying to convince the President to spend his winters at a mansion that he owned on Bird Key. Harding died before the Winter White House plan could be finalized and the mansion, known as the New Edzell Castle, later became the home of Ida Ringling North.<sup>92</sup>

After the death of Harding in 1923, Calvin Coolidge became President and both he and First Lady Grace Coolidge became, arguably, the most passionate circus fans ever to occupy the White House, and although Coolidge had a reputation as a man of few words, he didn’t mind talking about the circus.

Just prior to joining John Ringling for a performance in 1924, Coolidge proudly admitted to the White House press corps that he came from a family of “inveterate attenders of circuses,” and began reminiscing about various circuses he had seen as a boy in Vermont. He mentioned that his grandfather and father seldom missed a circus when they were growing up and told the story of his grandfather once riding 65 miles on horseback to see a circus performance.

Coolidge went on to say that he saw his first circus when he was six years old and he could distinctly remember seeing Adam Forepaugh sitting at the ticket wagon watching the sale of tickets. The President then spoke of the first time that he saw Barnum & Bailey, and his experience of getting up at three o’clock in the morning to take a wagon over the mountains to Rutland, Vermont to watch the train unload, often being disappointed that the tents were already up when his family arrived on the lot.<sup>93</sup>

No doubt memories of those days came back that afternoon when the President and Mrs. Coolidge watched a performance that included Lillian Leitzel, May Wirth and Berta Beeson, all performing to the beat of Merle Evans’ big top band.

Two years later, in 1926, the Circus Fans Association of America held its first convention in Washington and President Coolidge invited the entire group to the White House. As he greeted the CFA members, he said, “I wish I could join your society. I have often gone 15 to 25 miles to see a circus.”<sup>94</sup>

Although the President could not join them at the circus that day, Grace Coolidge did attend the matinee with John Ringling, and she proved to be a serious fan. Two years later, in 1928, the First Lady attended Ringling Bros. and Barnum & Bailey three times, twice in Washington and that summer in Duluth, Minnesota when the First Family was vacationing in nearby Brule, Wisconsin.

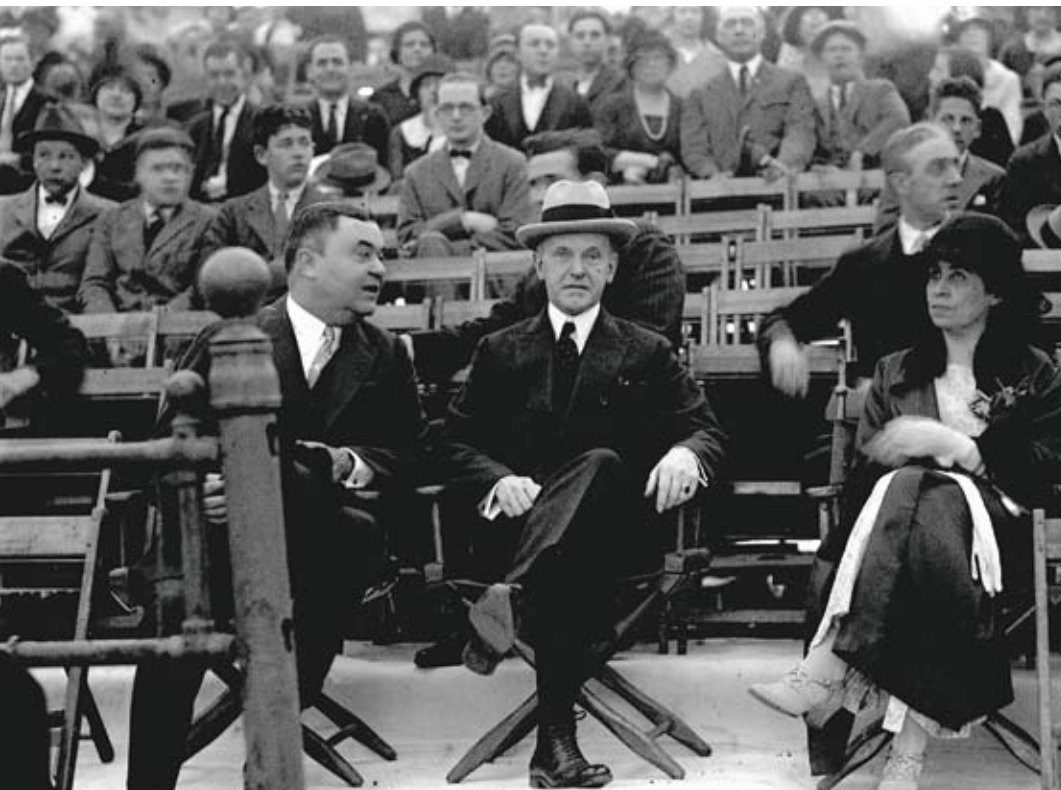
Over the years, Grace Coolidge became very close to Lillian Leitzel, and when Mrs. Coolidge was in the audience Leitzel would always bow toward the First Lady’s box, and the First Lady would always acknowledge the act, on one occasion rising to her feet and vigorously waving her handkerchief so that everyone could share her enthusiasm.

Only two days prior to her fatal fall in Copenhagen, Lillian Leitzel spoke with a Danish reporter about her relationship with the First Family, saying, “Mrs. Coolidge is a very charming woman who always comes and sees my act when I am around. When Calvin Coolidge resided in the White House Mrs. Coolidge invited me to the presidential home and was very nice to me.”<sup>95</sup> After her death it was reported that one of Leitzel’s most prized possessions was a photograph of the First Lady signed “To Lillian Leitzel, with the affectionate regards of Grace Coolidge.”<sup>96</sup>

While First Lady Lou Hoover did not have the same relationship with circus performers that Grace Coolidge had, Herbert Hoover’s wife did attend Ringling Bros. and Barnum & Bailey several times while her husband was president, and while Hoover himself never attended the show in Washington, his Vice President, Charles Curtis, was frequently seen on the lot talking to fellow Kansan Merle Evans.

According to press agent Floyd Bell, he and Merle once visited the Vice President’s office for a chat and with showtime approaching Curtis insisted on loaning the bandmaster his official limousine to get back to the showgrounds.





*In the mid-1920s, Calvin and Grace Coolidge were America's number one circus fans, often accompanied to the show by John Ringling.*

Chris Berry collection

Just before the matinee that day, the limousine carrying Evans and Bell rolled onto the lot much to the surprise of John Ringling who said, "It will be on the expense account this week that you will charge \$10.00 for a taxicab, but maybe it's worth it, as it gives a bit of dignity to a press agent, if that can be done."<sup>97</sup>

Shortly after Franklin Roosevelt took office in 1933, General Manager Samuel Gumpertz reached out to the White House in hopes of getting the new president to attend the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary Golden Jubilee performance.<sup>98</sup> At first it appeared FDR might attend, but the plan was scratched because of his inability to easily move about the lot, and the fact that his disability would be apparent to the thousands of spectators in the big top.<sup>99</sup>

The day after the circus opened its 1938 Washington engagement, the show's new President, John Ringling North visited Franklin Roosevelt for what appears to be a five-minute appointment at 10:55 a.m. on Tuesday May 17.<sup>100</sup>

Whether the meeting only lasted five minutes is unknown as the Roosevelt's appointment book shows Secretary of Labor Harold Ickes also entered the Oval Office at 11:00 a.m. Perhaps North had merely stopped by to drop off tickets for the White House staff, or perhaps they discussed the strike that had slowed the circus that spring at Madison Square Garden. The labor problems between the circus and the American Federation of Actors had been temporarily solved two days before, however within a month another strike would cripple the circus in Scranton, Pennsylvania.



*Warren Harding invited his friend John Ringling to lunch at the White House in 1921 and 1922. Ringling had hoped that Harding would spend his winters at a mansion that he owned in Sarasota.*

Library of Congress

When the show returned to Washington the following year, Henry

Ringling North was the President's first appointment on the morning of May 16, ostensibly to drop off tickets for those who worked in the West Wing.<sup>101</sup> Although the President did not attend the circus, among those who used the tickets was the Secretary of Commerce Harry Hopkins and his young daughter Diana.<sup>102</sup>

On May 26, 1942, John and Henry Ringling North returned to the Oval Office together, along with Press Secretary Frank Braden,<sup>103</sup> and it is likely that wartime travel restrictions were among the topics discussed.

World War II was in its early stages when the Norths had their White House meeting, and Henry Ringling North later said, "We almost decided not to send the show out that year. We sounded out opinion in Washington as to the wisdom of continuing. It was almost unanimously in favor of it as a morale builder in a time of sorrow and public uncertainty."

After meeting Roosevelt, the show issued a statement that included the sentence: "President Roosevelt personally has expressed his appreciation to the fact that the show is going on...."<sup>104</sup>

The 1942 circus was strongly influenced by the work of designer Norman Bel Geddes and featured the "Holidays" spec, the Elephant Ballet, and a patriotic finale where four huge portraits of President Roosevelt were unveiled, consis-

tently receiving tremendous ovations.<sup>105</sup>  
By the time that the circus returned to Washington in 1943, Robert Ringling was in charge of the show, and on opening day, he presented President Roosevelt with a gold pass to *The Greatest Show on Earth*.<sup>106</sup>

When Roosevelt died unexpectedly in the spring of 1945, most circuses canceled performances. Ringling Bros. and Barnum & Bailey passed up what promised to be a near sellout in Madison Square Garden, and at the Chicago Stadium, Arthur Wirtz' Barnes Bros. refunded tickets for the April 14 performance. In Sacramento, Polack Bros. canceled its matinee, as did Arthur Bros. in Fresno. Only in Los An-

147		MAY 26	
Tues.			
APPOINTMENTS		APPOINTMENTS	
8.00	2.15	(Lt. Col. William Clark)	
8.15	2.30		
8.30	2.45		
8.45	3.00		
9.00	3.15		
9.15	3.30		
9.30	3.45		
9.45	4.00	Press	
10.00	4.15		
10.15	4.30		
10.30	4.45		
10.45	5.00		
11.00	5.15		
11.15	5.30	Hon. Oliver P. Newman	
11.30	5.45	Hon. Rexford G. Tugwell	
11.45	6.00	Sir Gija Bajpai	
12.00	6.15		
12.15	6.30		
12.30	6.45	The Secy. of State	
12.45	7.00	Mr. John Ringling North	
1.00	7.15	Mr. Henry Ringling North	
1.15	7.30	Mr. Frank Graden	
1.30	7.45	(Lundah) (Hon. David Miles)	
1.45	8.00		
2.00	8.15		

During a meeting with Franklin Roosevelt in 1942, the President told John and Henry Ringling North that he believed the circus would build morale during wartime.

FDR Presidential Library and Museum

geles where Russell Bros. and Cronin Bros. Circuses were battling day-and-date were performances given.<sup>107</sup>

The new President, Harry Truman, was a long time Shriner, and when Washington's Almas Temple was preparing for its annual circus in 1946, the local Shrine leadership



Henry Ringling North met President Roosevelt in 1939 and dropped off circus tickets to those who worked in the West Wing.  
Library of Congress, Washington, D.C.

delivered a Gold Pass to the President. During the photo op with the Shriners, Truman said that he would like to attend “because he hadn’t seen a circus in years.” Although the President did not attend the circus produced by Hamid-Morton, the First Lady, Bess Truman, did use the tickets.<sup>108</sup>

After Truman made comments supporting the circus, Ringling Bros. and Barnum & Bailey invited him to see the show under the big top, but because of security concerns, the Secret Service turned thumbs down. The Ringling press agents were persistent however, eventually offering a private morning performance for only the President and his guests, but that idea was also rejected.<sup>109</sup>

In 1948, Truman and New York Governor Thomas Dewey were in a pitched battle for the White House. While Dewey had been the favorite, Truman gained traction during a popular whistle stop campaign across the heartland of America. Huge crowds turned out to hear the “plain speaking” President, occasionally to the detriment of traveling shows. On September 25, while Al G. Kelly & Miller Bros. was in Jefferson, Iowa, Truman’s train made a stop in the nearby town of Dexter. Kelly-Miller had a very small audience that day and blamed it on the competition from the President.<sup>110</sup> Late in the campaign Truman day-and-dated Cole Bros. in San Antonio and again the townspeople chose





*Harry S. Truman was a long time Shiner who was presented with a gold pass to the Hamid-Morton Circus, which performed for Washington's Ararat Temple in 1946.*

Harry Truman Library and Museum

the President over the circus.<sup>111</sup>

On Election Day the people of both Iowa and Texas chose Truman over Dewey, and Melvin Hildreth, a long-time Washington D.C. circus fan was chosen as the Chairman of the 1949 Inauguration Committee. As Hildreth planned the inaugural events, he made sure that the big top was well represented. In addition to placing thousands of spectators on Ringling Bros. and Barnum & Bailey's new mechanized seat wagons,<sup>112</sup> he worked with Cole Bros. press agent Bev. Kelley to secure the "America" steam calliope as Kentucky's entry in the inaugural parade.

Kelley had been told that there could be no commercial signage on the calliope, but later said that just before the parade stepped off, the temporary banner that was covering the Cole Bros. title was mysteriously "lost," exposing the title to everyone on the route. As Kelley said with a wink, "In the finest circus tradition, we decided to carry on despite our adversity."<sup>113</sup>

The calliope, with its eight-horse

hitch, was the hit of the parade, with wire service photographs transmitted to newspapers across the country, along with network radio interviews. The parade was also the first to be televised, and the pioneer broadcasters who described the events that day also mentioned that the historic wagon was the property of Cole Bros.<sup>114</sup>

Later that year Ringling Bros. and Barnum & Bailey acknowledged Truman's leadership in the finale titled "The Glorious Fourth." According to some, the tribute fell flat. In an otherwise positive review, *Variety* said, "The Glorious Fourth builds up to a curtain that drops away revealing a giant portrait of President Truman. Why Truman brings giggles instead of a burst of patriotic fervor from the audience is something else again."<sup>115</sup>

Four years later the circus was again represented at the inauguration of General-turned-President Dwight D. Eisenhower. Three elephants from the Mills Bros. Circus walked the parade route along with circus owner Jack Mills and el-



*The Cole Bros. Circus America Steam Calliope was a feature of Harry Truman's Inaugural Parade in 1949.*

Harry Truman Library and Museum



*Former Al G. Barnes Circus cowboy Monte Montana lassoed President Eisenhower during his first Inaugural Parade in 1953.*

United Press Telephoto

elephant trainer Hugo Schmitt. When “Miss Burma” reached the White House reviewing stand, the elephant performed a few tricks and Eisenhower tipped his hat in acknowledgment, and when Eisenhower was reelected in 1956, Mills brought the elephant back for a repeat performance along with a baby named “Little Miss Burma.”

In addition to the symbols of the Republican Party, Eisenhower’s first Inaugural parade also featured former Al G. Barnes cowboy Monte Montana whose rope-spinning act was a feature of a mounted cowboy unit. At the reviewing stand Montana threw his lasso over the shoulders of a spectator in the diplomatic seating, then retrieving his lariat, he rolled it over his head as an invitation to the President. Ike grinned and took a step forward as the circus cowboy “roped” the new Chief Executive.

The night before Eisenhower took his first Oath of

conclusion of the performance, a large banner of President Eisenhower was unfurled in the same manner as it had been for both Presidents Roosevelt and Truman.

Although Dwight and Mamie Eisenhower did not have

Office, a gala performance was held honoring the new president, and among those on the bill was former Ringling star Unus. A reviewer of the show said that he “brought down the house” with his one-finger stand.<sup>116</sup>

Eisenhower’s popularity extended to the Ringling Bros. and Barnum & Bailey performance in 1954. The finale that year was titled “U.N.,” and was described in the program as “A Touching Tribute to President Eisenhower as an Illustrious Leader Both in War and in Peace.” The closing number also featured a song titled “U.N.,” that was composed by John Ringling North.<sup>117</sup> At the



*The finale of Ringling Bros. and Barnum & Bailey in 1954 was a salute to the United Nations and President Dwight D. Eisenhower.*

The Ringling Museum, Tibbals Circus Collection



children at the time they were in the White House, Vice President Richard Nixon had two daughters, and while he was unable to join them at a performance of the Almas Shrine Circus in 1953, two years later the entire Nixon family attended Ringling Bros. and Barnum & Bailey as the guest of General Manager Michael Burke.

During the years that Nixon was Vice President he participated in a number of events which increased his national profile. Shortly after assuming the office, he literally walked into a lion's cage with veteran trainer Terrell Jacobs. The stunt was part of Nixon's induction into the Circus Saints and Sinners club. During the ceremony, Nixon stepped into the cage and put his hand on the lion's nose. One of those in attendance said that as the lion started to yawn, "you never saw a lion unpetted faster!"<sup>118</sup>

In 1960, Nixon was narrowly defeated by President John F. Kennedy, and although Kennedy never took his young family to the circus during the time that he was in office, the Ringling press agents did make the effort. In the spring of 1962, advance clown Jackie LeClaire made the rounds in Washington and on Capitol Hill, photographers snapped photos of House Speaker John McCormick rapping LeClaire on the head with his gavel. Later that day the clown made a trip to the East Wing of the White House where he met with

presidential assistant John J. McNally and protocol officer Hortense Burton. Although LeClaire did not get to meet any members of the First Family, he did bring with him a large stuffed giraffe which he left for four year old Caroline Kennedy as a gift from the circus.<sup>119</sup>

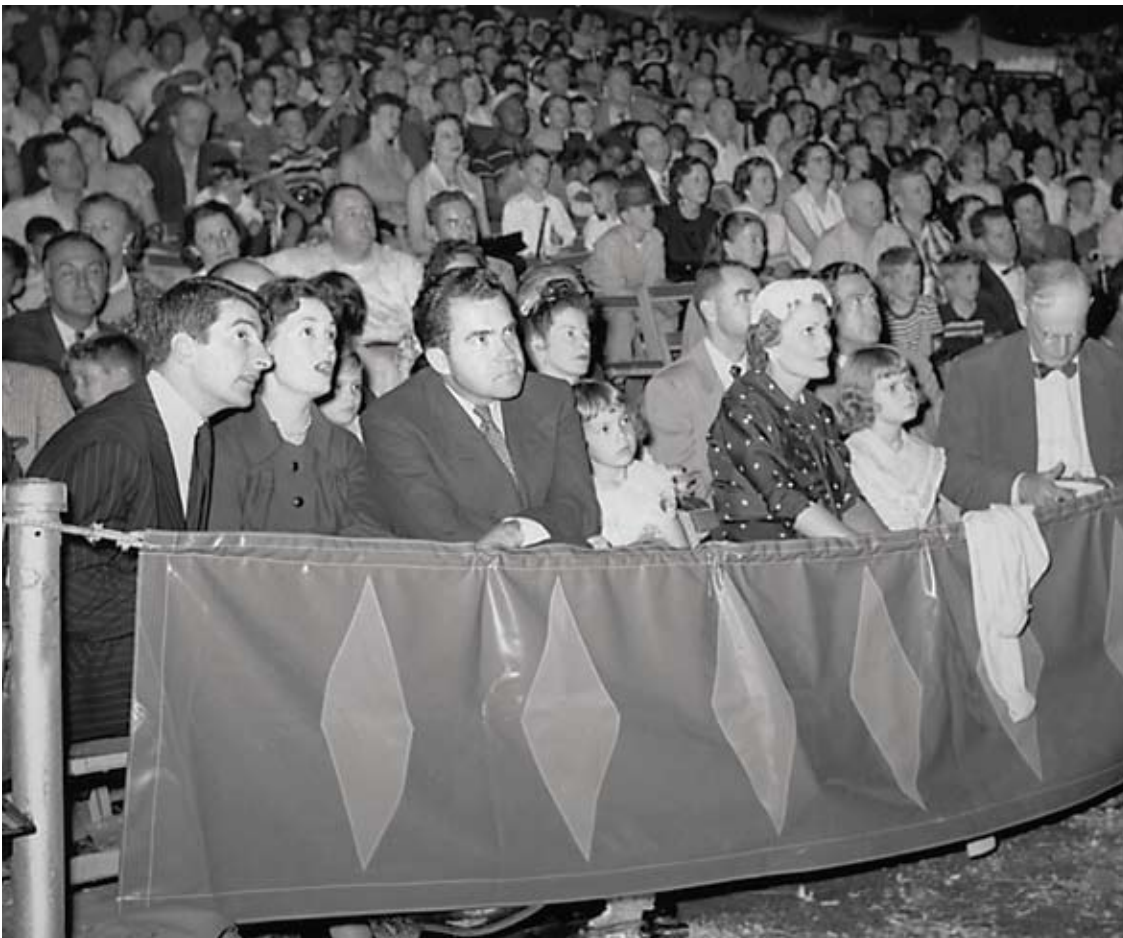
After Kennedy's assassination the former First Lady was determined that her children experience life as any other child. Only three months after her husband was murdered Jacqueline Kennedy took Caroline and John, Jr. to the 1964 edition of Ringling Bros. and Barnum & Bailey at the Washington Coliseum. A few months later, the family moved to New York, and in the spring of 1965, Mrs. Kennedy took John, Jr. to see a performance of the circus at the old Madison Square Garden on Eighth Avenue and 49<sup>th</sup> Street.

Three years later the circus moved from that arena in midtown Manhattan to the new Madison Square Garden that had been built above Pennsylvania Station. The 1968 season also marked the first year that the circus was operated by the partnership of Roy Hofheinz, Irvin and Israel Feld, and to acknowledge the new arena and new era for the circus, choreographer Richard Barstow directed a spec titled "The Inaugural Ball," which was set during the period when James Madison was President.

The year 1968 is remembered for a tumultuous campaign which elevated Richard Nixon to the White House in a race that pitted him against Minnesota Senator Hubert Humphry and Alabama Governor George Wallace.

Nixon had a long history of public service and was first elected to the House of Representatives at the end of World War II, yet of all of the jobs on his resume, he later said that his "favorite" was when he operated a carnival game as a teenager.

According to Nixon, during the summers of 1928 and 1929 he managed a gaming booth at a carnival in Arizona where he operated what he called "Dick's Wheel of Fortune." His most unlikely customer was his 81-year old grandmother



*Vice President Richard Nixon and his family were guests of Ringling Bros. and Barnum & Bailey's General Manager Michael Burke in 1955.*

The Ringling Museum, Tibbals Circus Collection

Almira, who he persuaded to forget her Quaker principals and place the one and only bet of her life. With true beginner's luck, her number came up and she won a large ham.<sup>120</sup>

Although the Watergate Scandal would eventually force Nixon's resignation, his administration is also remembered for the success he had in opening relations with both China and the Soviet Union. In May of 1972, Nixon met with Soviet leaders in Moscow, and at the same time that he was extending his hand to the Russians, the First Lady's was grabbed by a Russian circus bear.

During a performance of the Moscow State Circus, Mrs. Nixon was taken to a practice ring where she met several performers and told them how much she enjoyed the show. As she was greeting the clowns and aerialists, a bear was led in without her noticing. It stood quietly behind her until she turned. At that point Mrs. Nixon was visibly surprised as the bear raised up on his hind legs. Trainer Ivan Kudryasev then introduced her to the bear named Gosha, and First Lady recovered just long enough to give the symbol of Mother Russia a quick "pawshake."<sup>121</sup>

Despite the practical joke that was played on her during her first visit to the Moscow Circus, when Nixon returned to the Soviet Union in 1974 the First Lady again attended a circus performance, this time accompanied by Secretary General Leonid Brezhnev's wife Viktoria.

Following Nixon's resignation he rarely made public appearances, however exactly ten years to the day that he and Brezhnev signed two agreements that would limit the growth of American and Soviet nuclear arsenals, the former President attended a performance of Ringling Bros. and Barnum & Bailey at New York's Madison Square Garden with his wife Pat, daughter Tricia and two of his grandchildren. According to the *New York Daily News*, hardly anyone in the crowd recognized Nixon, but after the show he had a chance to meet with the Blue Unit's clown alley.

As he was getting ready to leave the Garden, clown Tommy Parrish asked the former President if he could take a photo. Nixon said yes and joked, "I hope you don't have any trouble identifying the clowns!"<sup>122</sup>

Among those who met Nixon at the circus was Sigrid Gebel, wife of Gunther Gebel-Williams. "He was a circus fan, bless his heart," and clearly he was, as only six months after attending a performance of the Blue Unit at Madison Square Garden, Nixon and his family drove from his home in Saddle River, New Jersey to the Meadowlands where the Red Unit was showing.

"He came with his grandchildren, very nice children, and we had a nice conversation," Gebel recalled, "and afterward he sent us a very nice thank you note."<sup>123</sup> Just as Nixon had spoken with the Blue Unit Clowns at Madison Square Garden, he also spent time talking to a group of about a half-dozen Red Unit clowns who greeted the Nixon family in their private box. Looking back on the meeting, one of them, Huel Speight said, "He told us he was a clown at



*Following the assassination of John F. Kennedy, his widow was determined that their children experience life no differently than any others, including annual trips to Ringling Bros. and Barnum & Bailey. This photograph was taken at the Washington Coliseum in 1964.*

Robert Harmel Collection

heart."<sup>124</sup>

Kenneth Feld also recalled the personal notes that Nixon would send him after attending a circus performance. "He had an extraordinary memory and he would write letters and do a whole critique of what he liked. Because of his connection to China he was fascinated with the Shanghai Acrobats," the group of performers that Feld was able to bring to the United States in 1986 after negotiating with the Chinese government for twelve years. "He thought it was the greatest thing ever to have Chinese performers in the show."<sup>125</sup>

In 1976, the United States was celebrating its Bicentennial, and both units of Ringling Bros. and Barnum & Bailey were wrapped in patriotism that was sweeping across the country. On February 3, 1976, Irvin Feld wrote a letter to President Gerald R. Ford:



Dear Mr. President:

*Ringling Bros. and Barnum & Bailey Circus has been a tradition in America for 106 years. For over 100 years we have performed every spring in the city of Washington. We are proud that, during this time, many Presidents and their families have visited and enjoyed the show.*

*The Circus has been part of this country's history dating back to George Washington's time. We are honored that we have been named an official Bicentennial event by the American Revolution Bicentennial Administration, and we are working with the ARBA in our efforts to support the Bicentennial program in the nation's capital.*

*Tuesday, April 6th, will be the opening night of the Special Bicentennial Edition of The Greatest Show on Earth, to be held at the D.C. Armory. We would be deeply honored if you and your family would accept our invitation to join us on that evening to help celebrate this very special occasion.*

*I am aware, of course, that you have an extremely busy schedule, but I feel certain that you and your family will truly enjoy participating in what promised to be an outstanding Bicentennial event.*

*Looking forward with great anticipation to your acceptance, I remain,*

*Respectfully, Irvin Feld<sup>126</sup>*

On the day after Feld wrote to the President, the head of the Bicentennial Administration sent a letter to the White House. John Warner, who would later serve as a U.S. Senator from Virginia, wrote: "Unless there are overriding considerations of which I am not aware, I recommend that the President accept this invitation. After all, there is nothing more American than the circus."<sup>127</sup>

Over the next several weeks, 38 different memos circulated between White House staff and members of the Ford family as the administration decided who should best represent the President at the Bicentennial Edition of the circus. On April 2, the White House responded that the president's 18-year-old Daughter Susan, who had also attended the circus in 1975, would serve as "Honorary Ringmistress." At the Red Unit performance that evening the First Daughter donned a top hat, blew the whistle to start the show, and during the performance rode a symbol of the Republican Party around the hippodrome track under the personal guidance of Gunther Gebel-Williams.<sup>128</sup>

Like many Americans who grew up in the rural South during The Great Depression, Jimmy Carter had few entertainment options. As he later wrote, "the most highly organized event was a small circus that came to town every year, always preceded by a spirited negotiation between the owners and the city fathers concerning the license fees and

the character of the exhibits." That second half of that negotiation was evidently an integral part of whether the circus would be allowed to set up its tent in his hometown of Plains, Georgia. Carter admitted that he had once attended a traveling show in the nearby town of Americus where the girls "took off every stitch of clothes."

Carter said that shows of that nature were prohibited in Plains, and the circus that would set up each year was a one-ring affair which included tests of strength and games of chance. Carter said that he also enjoyed the day *after* the circus folded its tents when he and his friends would "examine every square inch to find coins that had been lost." The future president recalled after one circus left town, he found a quarter and two nickels.<sup>129</sup>

Eventually Carter moved from his peanut farm, to the Governor's Mansion and then to the White House. In those years, he and his family were often the guest of Ringling Bros. and Barnum & Bailey, both in Georgia and Washington, D.C.

Sigrid Gebel remembered the time that Governor Carter, his wife Rosalynn and their daughter Amy visited the show when he was running for President. "He and his family saw the show and afterward as Gunther was giving them a tour he said, 'I need to introduce you to my wife.'" Sigrid said that when she opened the trailer door, she did not expect to see the future President looking up at her. "I wasn't ready for him. I was just doing dishes and wearing an apron."

Sigrid Gebel was much more prepared the next time that she saw Carter at the White House when she, Gunther Gebel-Williams, their son Mark and Shirley Feld were given a tour of the Oval Office.<sup>130</sup>

The next occupant of the White House was Ronald Reagan, and while his early job as a lifeguard is well documented, in 1928 he also had a brief stint working on Fred Buchanan's Robbins Bros. Circus. Although some biographers have claimed that Reagan worked as a "roustabout" that year on Ringling Bros. and Barnum & Bailey, a check of the routes of various circuses during that time span indicates that in all likelihood it was Robbins Bros. that he helped when it played his hometown of Dixon, Illinois on May 16, 1928. Reagan was 17 years old at the time.

According to Reagan, he and his brother Neil were each paid 25-cents to feed and take care of the 13 elephants on the show and spot various wagons on the lot. It is unknown whether Reagan and his brother actually traveled with the circus, or whether they just helped out that one day that Robbins Bros. was in Dixon.<sup>131</sup>

In 1980, Reagan defeated Jimmy Carter in a landslide election, and only 83 days after his inauguration the new president and three others were shot as he was leaving a speech at a Washington hotel. Although Reagan was released from the hospital eleven days later, he continued to recuperate at home for several weeks. Four days after he arrived back at the White House the Ringling Bros. and Barnum &

Bailey Blue Unit unloaded its elephants at the Eckington rail yards and began an eight-and-a-half-mile trek to the White House.

When the elephants began marching down Pennsylvania Avenue the President pressed his nose against the glass of an upstairs window and waved vigorously, often with both hands over his head. As one observer noted, "His side must be sore, but his movement is clearly not constrained."<sup>132</sup>



*Gunther Gebel-Williams and his wife Sigrid first met Governor Jimmy Carter when he was running for President.*

*Sigrid Gebel collection*

President Reagan memorialized the day in his personal diary, writing: "The circus came to town and paraded in front of the White House and put on a show. They had a big Get-Well banner. I waved from the biggest window I could find and thank Heaven they saw me."<sup>133</sup>

Perhaps the person with the best view of the President was clown Michael "Tuba" Heatherton who was strapped into stilts that made him 10 feet tall. "It was one of the highlights of being on the road," Heatherton recalled. "It was incredibly windy that day. I was leaning into the wind and even leaning into the wind I was blown into a tree. Between gusts I was able to get to where everyone was in front of the White House."<sup>134</sup>

Peggy Williams was Education Outreach Manager for the Ringling circus that season and she was among those in front of the White House, "We had clowns and performers

**Dixon, Wed., May 16th**

**ROBBINS BROS**  
BIG 4 RING  
**WILD ANIMAL CIRCUS**  
**PONCA BILL'S WILD WEST**

2 SHOWS DAILY  
2:00 & 8:00 P.M.

TWICE ITS FORMER SIZE

**MANMOTH PAGEANT**  
HISTORIC AMERICA

THREE HERDS OF ELEPHANTS  
LARGEST CIRCUS IN WORLD GIVING STREET PARADE

1000 PEOPLE  
10 PERFORMING SEA LIONS

**ZOO - CIRCUS - WILDWEST**

**Tickets on sale at Sterling's Drug Store, including reserved seats Show Day only.**

*Ronald Reagan and his brother Neil worked with the Robbins Bros. Circus when it visited their hometown of Dixon, Illinois in 1928.*

*Circus World Museum*



in their costumes,” she recalled. “The police stopped traffic and Axel Gautier had the elephants do a long mount. It was a 21-trunk salute to the President.”<sup>135</sup>

Williams was also on hand when President Reagan attended a performance of the Blue Unit at the D.C. Armory on April 15, 1985, and in her role as Assistant Performance Director she recalled that it was not business as usual. “We had to do background checks for the cast and crew. That was the first show where we had metal detectors at all doors, and circus people do carry some interesting things with them!”<sup>136</sup>

Kenneth Feld also remembered how tight security was that day, and said the Secret Service wasn’t taking any chances. “They actually built a metal box on the track in front of where Reagan was seated. The idea was that they could put him into the box if necessary. It was strange and reminded me of a metal coffin.”<sup>137</sup>

The President attended the circus that day as part of Ringling Bros. and Barnum & Bailey’s “Safe Kids” program, developed in response to what was described as an “epidemic” of missing children. “Safe Kids” was a safety education program that the circus promoted in more than 85 cities that season. In the concourse of every arena, the circus provided identification documents for parents which included a color photograph of the child along with fingerprints and other pertinent information.

In his remarks before the show began the President praised the circus for its initiative, and before he started the

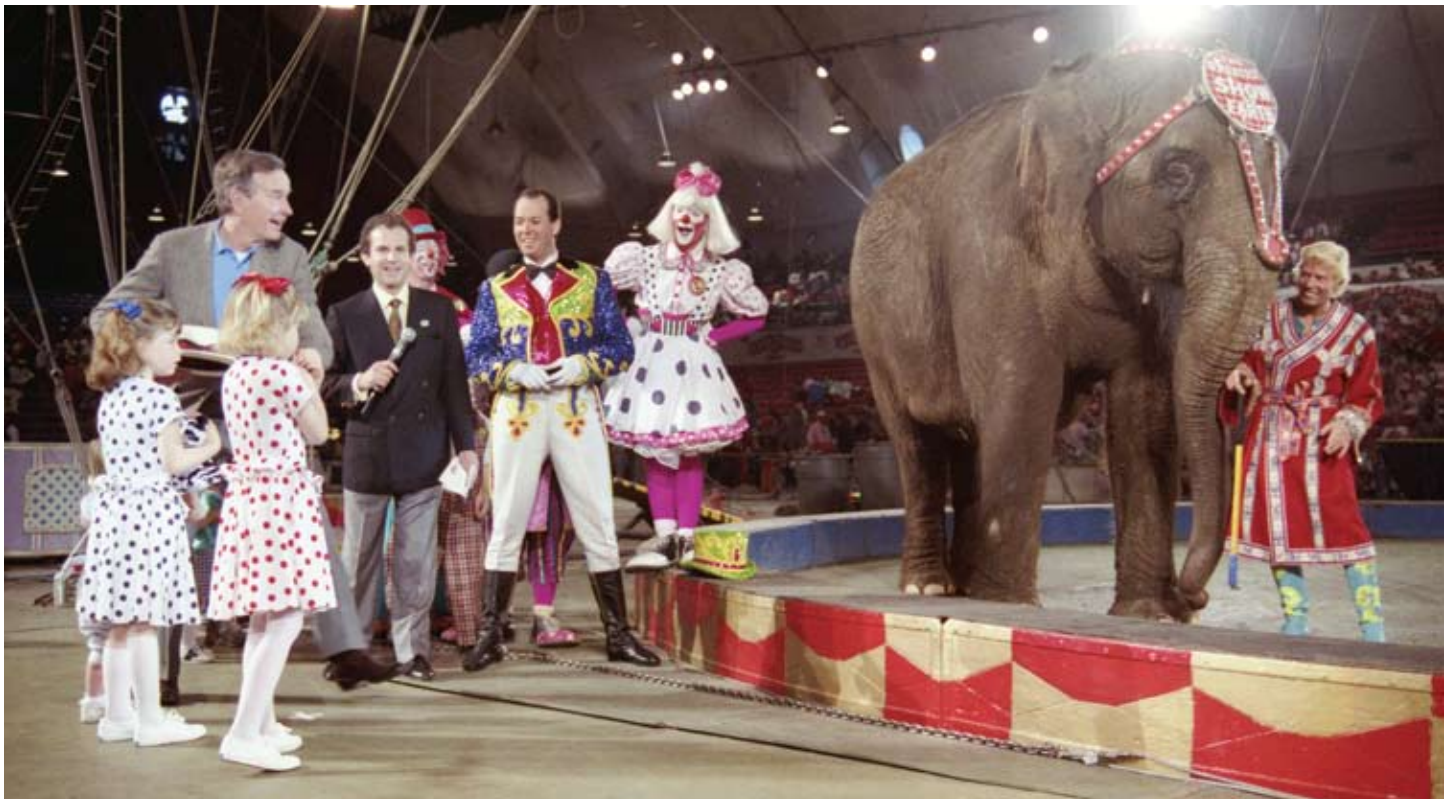
performance, he spoke of the legacy of the show. “You know, this year is the Ringling Bros. 100<sup>th</sup> birthday,” he quipped. “They are just a little older than I am.”<sup>138</sup> Reagan then settled into his seat with about 500 students from Martin Luther King Jr. Elementary School and enjoyed the first half of the show.<sup>139</sup>

That night the President wrote in his personal diary, “I hadn’t seen a circus in years. I’m impressed. It really is *The Greatest Show on Earth*.”<sup>140</sup>

Although he did not attend as frequently as other Chief Executives, Reagan was among the presidents who realized the significance of American history and culture. President Reagan was among those who sent a telegram of condolence to the Feld family when Irvin Feld died unexpectedly in September of 1984.<sup>141</sup>

As Ronald Reagan’s presidency was ending, Vice President George Herbert Walker Bush was the leading candidate to follow him into the Oval Office. Although Bush officially announced his candidacy in October of 1987, when the Red Unit arrived in Washington in April of 1988 the Vice President created a powerful photo opportunity as he threw his hat into the ring while his twin granddaughters, Kenneth Feld, Gunther Gebel-Williams and others looked on. “I think he truly enjoyed that day,” said Feld. “He was the nicest person ever, as was his wife Barbara. The circus worked very closely with her on the ‘Reading is Fundamental’ program which encouraged children to read.”<sup>142</sup>

In addition to his service as the 41<sup>st</sup> President of the



In 1988, Vice President George H. W. Bush reinforced his presidential candidacy by throwing his hat into the ring as Kenneth Feld, Gunther Gebel-Williams and ringmaster Eric Gillett looked on.

George H. W. Bush Presidential Library and Museum

United States, during World War II Bush was one of the Navy's youngest aviators. It was during his flight training that he had a run in with a circus. According to Bush as he was learning to fly along the Chesapeake Bay, he learned of a nearby beach where girls would frequently sunbathe, and it was popular for the pilots to fly low over the beach. Bush said that as he was coming in low one day, he noticed that a circus was setting up its tents. Evidently, the flyover upset the elephants, and at least one of them broke loose and ran through town. The future president said, "I was grounded for causing an elephant stampede – probably the only Navy pilot in American history who can make that claim."<sup>143</sup>

During the Presidency of Bill Clinton Cirque du Soleil was expanding rapidly with traveling performances in Canada and the United States and permanent productions in Las Vegas. In 1995, the international economic organization known as the G-7 was scheduled to meet in Halifax, Nova Scotia and the Canadian government asked Cirque du Soleil to create a special production for the dignitaries that would be attending. For three days in the middle of June Cirque put together a show that was based on three of their existing shows, *Alegria*, *Saltimbanco* and *Mystère*. Among those who attended the performance were President Bill Clinton, Russia's Boris Yeltsin, British Prime Minister John Major, French President Jacques Chirac and Japanese Prime Minister Tomiichi Murayama.

One of the performers in the special performance was trapeze artist Sarah Steben and her sister Karyne. "When we arrived on the site there was security like crazy," Sarah recalled. "There were guards on the roof, they looked at our equipment. We could see how serious this event was."<sup>144</sup>

After a day of meetings, the world leaders departed for the showgrounds. As the performance began former Canadian Prime Minister Jean Chretien realized that the Russian President was drunk. "Boris Yeltsin tried to join an act of Russian acrobats but found he was too tired to climb onto the stage."<sup>145</sup> Sarah Steben recalled the wild scene. "We were backstage, and we could hear the crowd going crazy. As we looked through the cracks, we could see him trying to get on the stage and after the acrobats finished their act, they told us what had happened."<sup>146</sup>

After the VIP performance, the dignitaries returned to their hotels, and the next day they began another day of meetings which included a tense discussion between Clinton and Yeltsin about the deteriorating situation in Chechnya.



*During the time that he was President, Bill Clinton and his family attended several performances of Cirque du Soleil.*

Canadian Broadcasting Co.

As Clinton and Yeltsin left the meeting, they bantered about the circus performance they had seen the night before. According to Deputy Secretary of State Strobe Talbott "Clinton said he had especially enjoyed the trapeze act performed by the two Steben sisters. 'It reminded me of us, Boris.' 'Exactly' said Yeltsin with a belly laugh, 'and no safety net.'"<sup>147</sup>

A few months after he attended the performance in Halifax, President Clinton surprised a Cirque du Soleil audience in the Washington suburb of McLean, Virginia. The President and First Lady, along with their 15-year-old daughter Chelsea and a male friend identified only as Eddie, caused a stir when they entered the yellow and blue striped tent and made their way to front-row seats accompanied by an entourage of Secret Service agents and reporters. During the performance, a fire-eater tossed a burning stick just a few feet from the first family and at one point during a clown act the Clintons ducked as they were hit with fake snow.<sup>148</sup>

On January 19, 2009, the day before Barack Obama was inaugurated as the nation's 44<sup>th</sup> President, an elephant was born at the Ringling Bros. and Barnum & Bailey Center for Elephant Conservation in Polk City, Florida. The 250-pound male Asian became the 22<sup>nd</sup> elephant to be born at the Center and was named in honor of the first African American president. "I said, you have to name it Barack," recalled Kenneth Feld. "It wasn't really a brainstorm, it just made sense."<sup>149</sup>

For a year, the baby elephant was nurtured at the Center by his mother Bonnie and the Feld elephant staff, prior to joining the Blue Unit in January 2010. After only two dates, Barack was returned to the Center to be treated for a virus. A few months later, he and his mother returned to the show.





On the day before Barack Obama was inaugurated, a male elephant was born at the Ringling Bros. and Barnum & Bailey Center for Elephant Conservation. The elephant is seen with Ginny Frisco, Joey Frisco and Pat Harned after he joined the circus in 2010.

Alabama Media Group

When Ringling Bros. and Barnum & Bailey announced five years later that it would be phasing out elephant performances, presidential candidate Donald Trump tweeted that he “would never go again,” only a few years after he had taken his family to see the circus at Madison Square Garden. While they were there, they had an opportunity to see the Red Unit elephant herd backstage.

Trump’s final visit to *The Greatest Show on Earth* came more than 20 years after he made a donation to the Big Apple Circus for a new big top that would be known as “The Trump Tent.”

Paul Binder, co-founder of the circus, was told in late 1986 that Trump would be making the donation. “He had never been to the Big Apple Circus, but at the time he was doing a lot of charitable things in New York and he saw this as another place to put his name.” Binder said that the actual cost of the tent and the new seating design was about \$400,000 but the \$100,000 contribution gave him naming rights for the tent that was manufactured by Canobbio in

Milan, Italy.

The new blue and yellow tent was 137 feet in diameter, and because it was opaque, the show was able to use additional theatrical lighting during matinee performances. In addition to the improved tent construction, a new seating arrangement was designed which improved visibility and increased the number of tickets that could be sold. “The new tent allowed us to increase capacity without changing the intimacy that we had created,” said Binder.<sup>150</sup>

Trump and then-wife Ivana served as honorary ringmasters at the black-tie gala which officially christened the tent at the opening of the production titled “A Thousand and One Nights at the Big Apple Circus.”

Although it would be decades until Trump would enter the political arena, when he ran for president in 2016, he found himself frequently being compared to P. T. Barnum. *The National Review* called Trump “the P. T. Barnum of American politics,” and *Salon* said he was “the second coming of P. T. Barnum.”<sup>151</sup>

In an interview on the NBC News program *Meet the Press*, host Chuck Todd noted that Trump had received many comparisons on the campaign trail: “Kim Kardashian, Biff from ‘Back to the Future,’ George Costanza, P. T. Barnum. Any of those you would consider a compliment?” Todd asked.

Without hesitation Trump said “P. T. Barnum. We have to build up the image of our country.”<sup>152</sup>

During the 2016 Presidential campaign, Ringling Bros. and Barnum & Bailey tried to distance itself from what the circus press agents called “the negative association the presidential election has brought to the words ‘circus’ and ‘clowns.’”

The tongue-in-cheek campaign titled #TakeBackTheCircus quoted ringmaster Johnathan Lee Iverson saying “Everyone from the media to the public to politicians to even President Barack Obama himself have repeatedly called the 2016 Presidential Election a circus or referred to the candidates as clowns. These comparisons need to stop! We want to #TakeBackTheCircus to where it belongs, to the real circus, the Ringling Bros. and Barnum & Bailey Circus.”<sup>153</sup>

The nation and the Presidency have both changed considerably since George Washington attended the first American circus in 1793. Over the past two centuries, 45 Presidents have reached the highest office and nearly all of them had a connection to the circus. Because of the media microscope that is now trained on the White House, when future presidents attend the circus – or even a movie or restaurant – their actions will be scrutinized as never before. Nevertheless, the public and presidents alike will always appreciate talented performers, including those who practice their art in the circus ring. While the stories of tomorrow’s performers and future presidents are yet to be written, as long as there are clowns, equestrians and aerialists, the relationship between *The Circus and the Presidency* will endure. **BW**



## Acknowledgements

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Future President Donald Trump donated \$100,000 to the Big Apple Circus in 1987. On opening night, he and then-wife Ivana were joined by circus co-founder Paul Binder as they served as honorary ringmasters.

Chris Berry collection



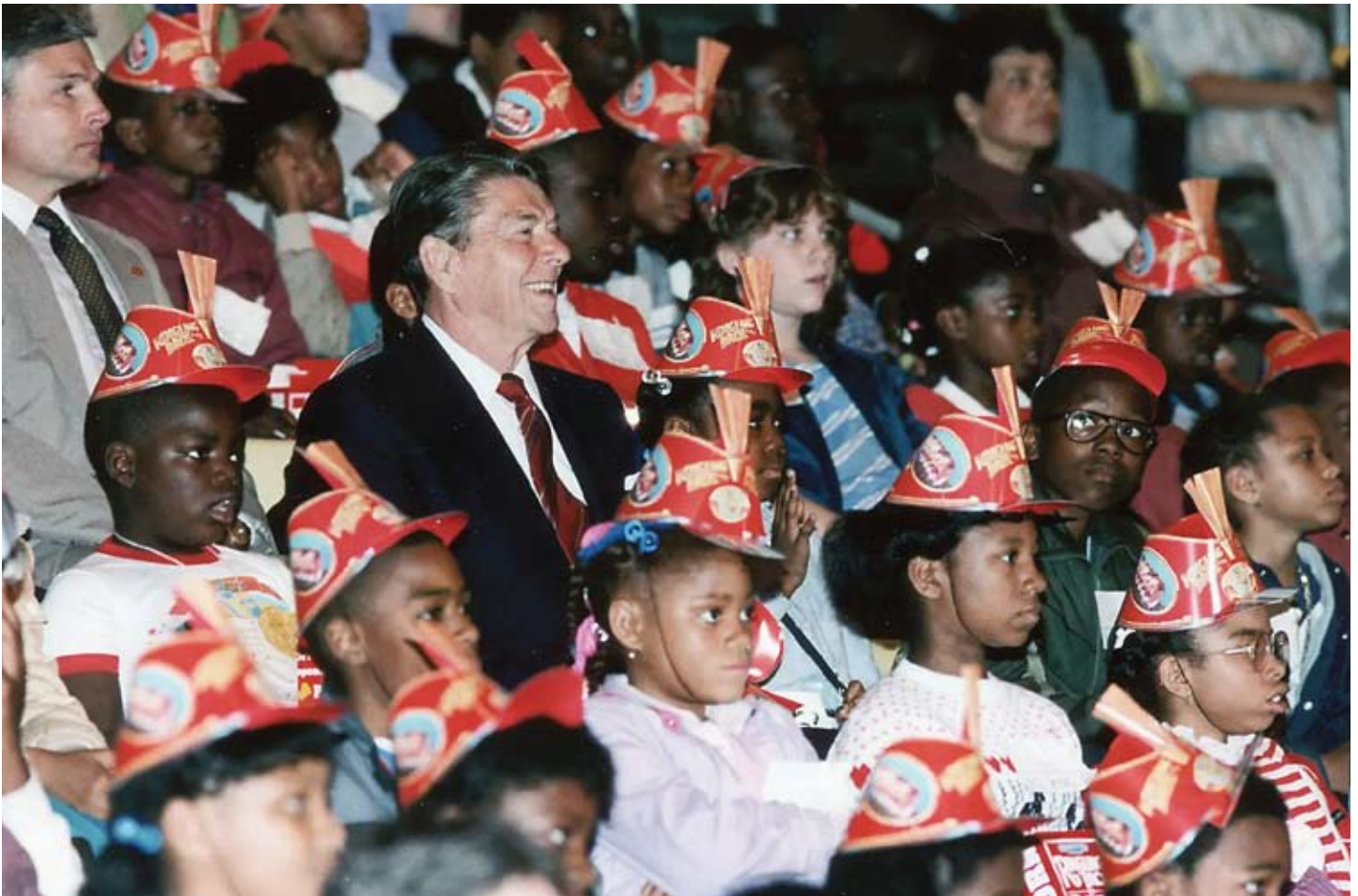
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Cincinnati Art Museum



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After Ronald Reagan attended Ringling Bros and Barnum & Bailey in 1985, he wrote in his diary that "it really is The Greatest Show on Earth."

Ronald Reagan Library



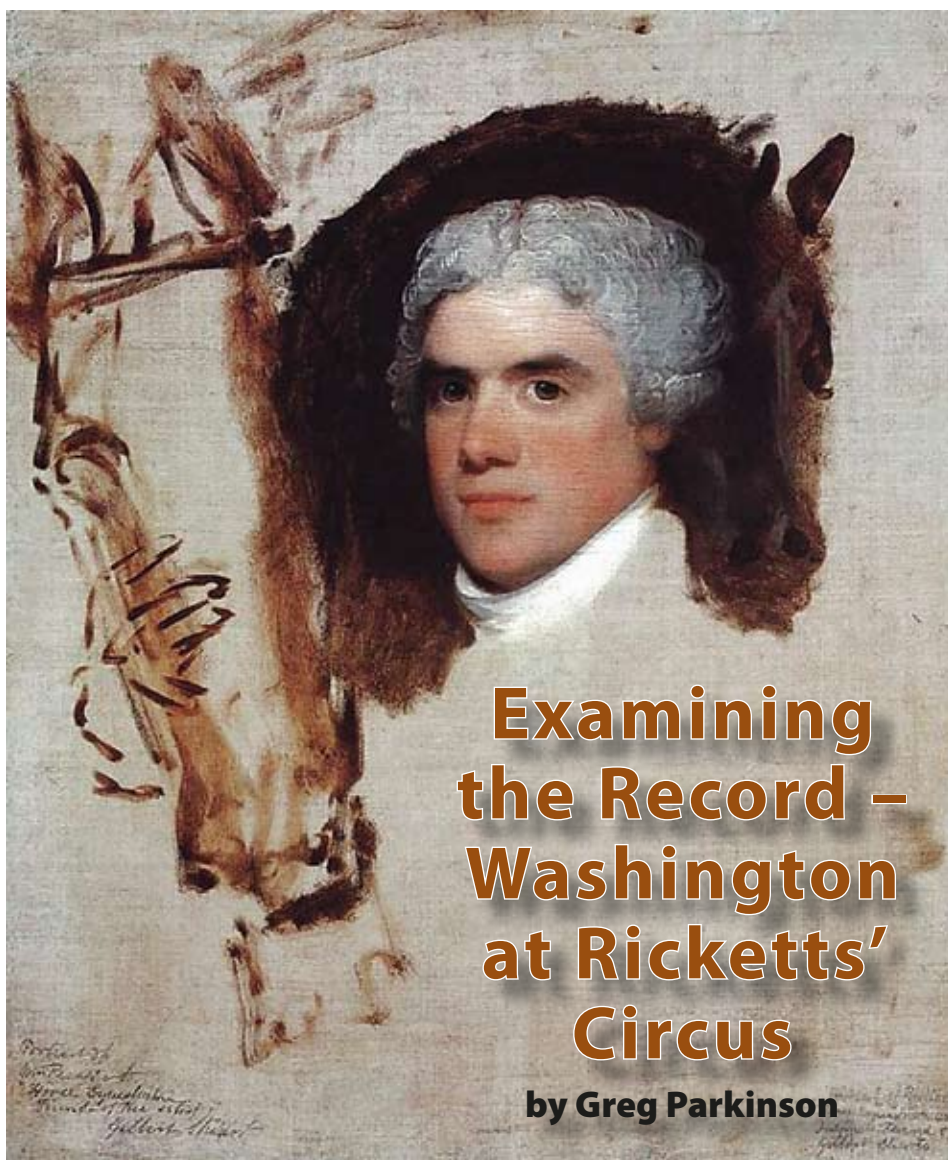
The nation celebrated George Washington's 200th Birthday in 1932, and the finale of the Downie Bros. Circus that season was a tribute to the First President.

The Ringling Museum, Tibbals Circus Collection

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## Examining the Record – Washington at Ricketts’ Circus

by Greg Parkinson

*We have a good sense of what John Bill Ricketts looked like by virtue of this unfinished oil painting brushed by Gilbert Stuart in the mid-1790s.*

National Gallery of Art – Washington, D.C.

John Bill Ricketts (1769-1802) and George Washington (1732-1799) experienced childhood on opposite sides of the Atlantic. The difference in their ages was generational. They both followed unique callings, and their lives certainly proceeded along dissimilar courses. Yet their paths crossed in the post-revolutionary United States, each of them contributing in their own way to the chronicle and celebrity of America’s first circus.

Ricketts arrived in the United States in 1792, and he began his riding school in Philadelphia on the southwest corner of Market and 12<sup>th</sup> streets on October 25 of that year.<sup>1</sup> Just over five months later,

on April 3, 1793, a 23-year-old Ricketts launched his new open-air circus at the same site. It is worth noting that the “President’s House” at 524-530 Market Street (originally known as High Street) was a mere six blocks east of the location where Ricketts established his circular arena. This executive mansion served as Washington’s office and local residence in Philadelphia from November 1790 until just a few days after John Adams became President on March 4, 1797 – a period that overlapped much of the time John Ricketts’ appeared in the city.

Secondary sources have claimed the 61-year old President was present

on the afternoon of April 3, 1793, but this seems unlikely and no one has ever uncovered documentation of such an alleged attendance. Supporting the near certainty that Washington did not see Ricketts’ inaugural American performance is a review published the following day in *Dunlap’s American Daily Advertiser*:

“Yesterday afternoon, Mr. Ricketts’s [sic] Circus in Market Street near the arsenal was opened with his first public exhibition. The Circus was filled with upwards of seven hundred spectators and had there been more room, it is probable that there would have been hundreds more. The debut of Mr. Ricketts before the respectable American assemblage, amongst whom were many excellent judges, seemed very interesting. He has trained up Pennsylvania horses...

“His performance was beyond expectation, beautiful, graceful and superb in the highest extreme... Suffice is to say that the opinions of the company agreed, in pronouncing Mr. Ricketts a most charming master of the science which he professes...”<sup>2</sup>

Although the review referenced the size of the audience and the spectators’ assessment of the performance, there was no mention of the President. Had he been present, there would surely have been an account to that effect. Nonetheless, there were occasions in April 1793 when Washington did attend Ricketts’ ring performance.

The first of these may have been Saturday, April 20. An ad for the circus in *The Mail or Claypoole’s Daily Advertiser*<sup>3</sup> set forth that President Washington and his wife would attend Ricketts’ show that night, and a notice in the *Aurora General Advertiser*<sup>4</sup> proclaimed, “The President & his Lady attend Ricketts’s circus this day.” It is beyond imag-

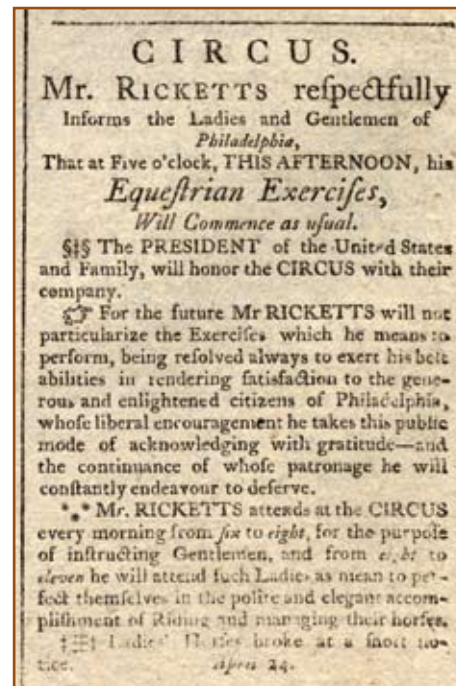


ination to think these announcements were made without an invitation having been extended to the President and a favorable reply having been received. Moreover, it would seem incomprehensible that Ricketts would have unreservedly fabricated such a claim, especially since Washington resided just down the street and undoubtedly would have become aware of the printed assertions. Yet no verifying primary documentation has been discovered for this possible Presidential visit.

However, there is confirmation that America's first President attended the country's first circus two days later on Monday, April 22. Two Philadelphia papers printed ads for Ricketts' on this date claiming President Washington would attend the 5:00 o'clock performance that day. These were the *Federal Gazette and Philadelphia Daily Advertiser* and the *Aurora General Advertiser* that noted on page 3, "The President of the United States and family are to honor the Circus with their company."<sup>5</sup> Historian Douglas S. Harvey (Ph.D. the University of Kansas) confirmed Washington's presence on this date in his 2010 book.<sup>6</sup>

A third date during the month when the President was heralded to be coming to the circus was two days later on Wednesday, April 24. A newspaper ad in *The Mail or Claypoole's Daily Advertiser* on that day noted the Ricketts' performance would commence "at five o'clock this afternoon...as usual" and that "The PRESIDENT of the United States and Family, will honor the CIRCUS with their company."<sup>7</sup> This announcement was also included in a small handbill for the performance on April 24 that concluded with "The PRESIDENT and his LADY will honor the CIRCUS with their company this evening."<sup>8</sup> Two contemporaneous writings confirm that the President attended Ricketts' on April 24. The first of these was penned by Washington himself who made mention of his attendance on that date in a letter to Mr. and Mrs. Samuel Powell,<sup>9</sup> they being among the closest friends George and

Martha had in Philadelphia. A second source is a diary entry written by a neighbor and another personal friend of the President.



*This Philadelphia newspaper advertisement announced that President Washington and his family would be attending Ricketts' circus on April 24, 1793. A letter written by the President himself and an entry in Jacob Hiltzheimer's diary confirm their actual attendance.*

Greg Parkinson newspaper collection

Jacob Hiltzheimer (1729-1798) was a prominent and wealthy resident of Philadelphia who supplied horses to the Continental Army during the War for Independence. After the War, he befriended Washington and often visited and dined with the President while he was in office.<sup>10</sup> Ten years prior to the Constitutional Convention of 1787, Hiltzheimer purchased a three and a half story house on the southwest corner of Market and Seventh streets. The year before, in 1776, Thomas Jefferson had rented rooms of the second floor of this house between May 23 and September 3, and it was there that he drafted the Declaration of Independence. It serves well to keep in mind the location of Hiltzheimer's home, today known as the Declaration House. It was one

block west of the President's House and only five blocks further west on Market Street to Ricketts' arena.

Hiltzheimer maintained a handwritten diary from 1765 until 1798. In this document, he wrote of three times in 1793 that he visited Ricketts' circus, noting that on two of these occasions the President was also there. The first of these provides additional confirmation of Washington's attendance on April 24. An entry for this date reads, "...after dinner Mr. and Mrs. BARGE and my three daughters went to Ricketts' [sic] circus. General Washington and family were present."<sup>11</sup>

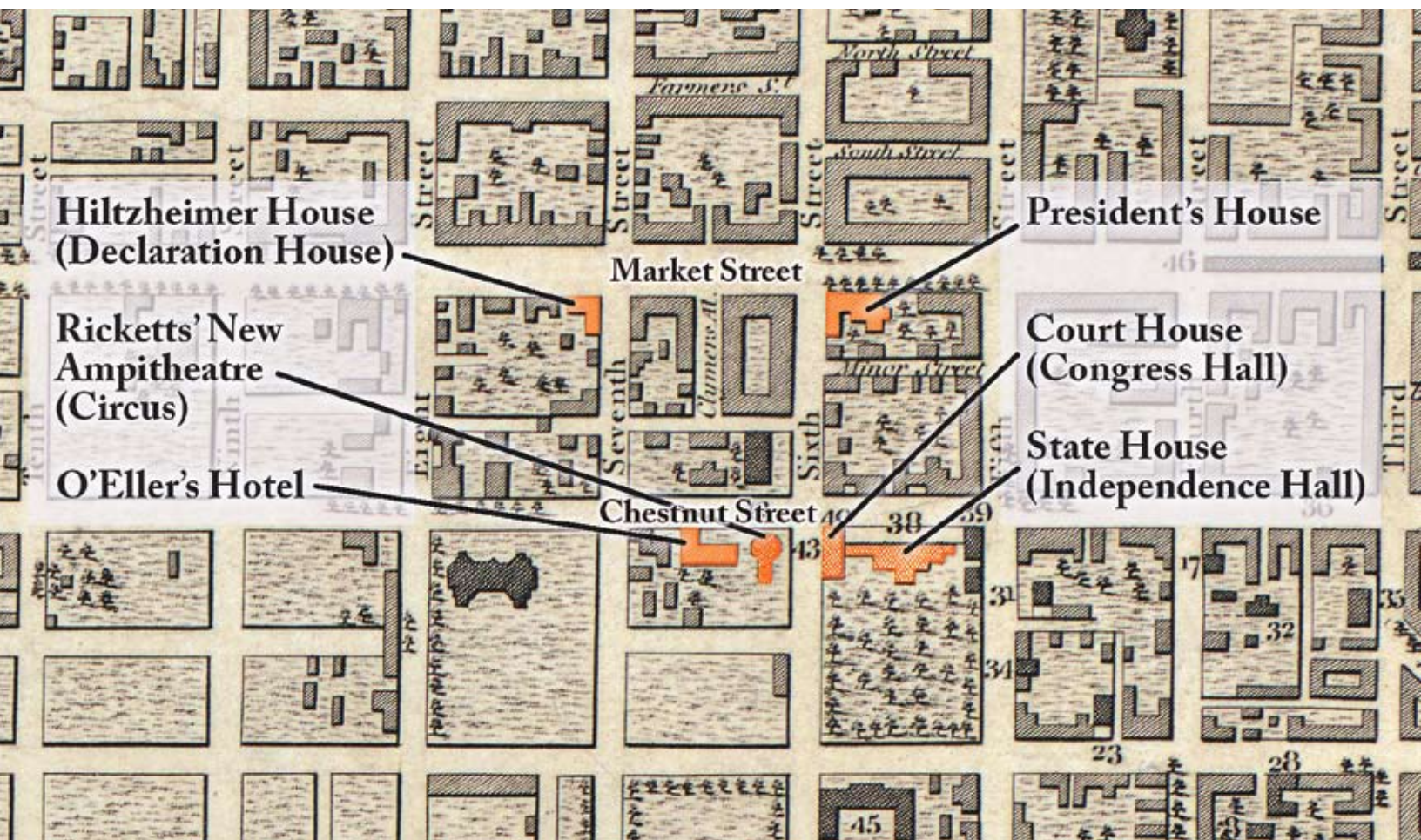
Hiltzheimer's diary also confirmed that during the summer of 1793, President Washington again saw Ricketts' show on July 13. "...we went to see Mr. Ricketts ride, and saw there the President and his lady."<sup>12</sup> Further proof of this visit appeared three days later when the *Aurora General Advertiser* reported:

"We are informed that the benefit given by Mr. Ricketts for the poor last Saturday amounted to four hundred and thirty dollars, which is a very handsome beginning for a FUND to be placed in the hands of the corporation for the purpose of supplying fire wood in the winter season to the indigent families requiring such assistance.

"The boxes and pitt [sic], though well filled, were not as crowded [sic] as was expected. The President of the United States and his family were among the companp [sic] who visited the circus, his presence added much to the satisfaction of the entertainment.

"Mr. Ricketts was not inattentive on this occasion; he took a good opportunity to pay a particular compliment to the President, for when he came to that part of the performance where he is obliged to take a





Detail from a 1796 City of Philadelphia map, engraved by John Cooke. The rectangular part of the circus structure on the south side of Ricketts' building was where the horses were stabled and part of the oval track was fashioned for the pony races.

Library of Congress Geography and Map Division – Washington, D.C.

glass of wine, one of his people demanded a toast, Mr. Ricketts then drank off a bumper to the health of 'The man of the people,' which was so well received that there was a general clap from every part of the circus, accompanied by a loud huzza."<sup>13</sup>

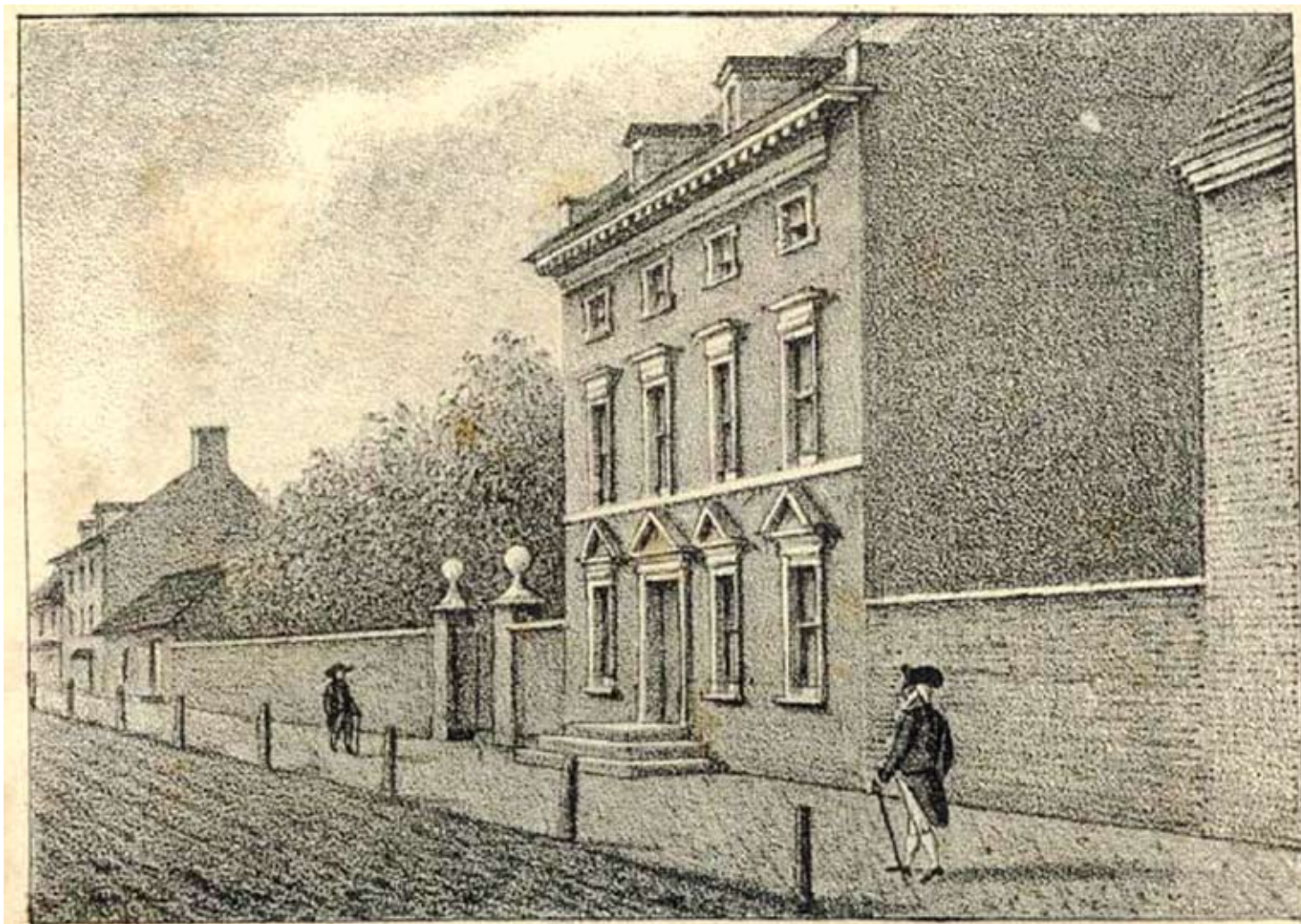
Two years later, in 1795, John Ricketts constructed an enclosed building in which to house his circus. Ricketts' New Amphitheatre (sometimes advertised as the Art Pantheon) opened with a performance on October 19, 1795.<sup>14</sup> The structure was 97 feet in diameter with 18-foot high wooden walls and a conical roof with a peak that reached 50 feet. It had both a circus ring and a small elevated stage, and its seating capacity was said to be about 1,200 to 1,400.<sup>15</sup> The New Amphitheatre was located on the southwest corner of Sixth and Chestnut streets, only two blocks south of the President's House. Congress Hall was immediately across the street and the clock tower of Independence Hall rose in the adjacent block on Chestnut.

Soon after the New Amphitheatre opened, the President and Mrs. Washington again attended Ricketts' circus. It was on a Saturday night sometime between October 24 and December 5, 1795, although the exact date has not been deter-

mined.<sup>16</sup> A man in Charleston, South Carolina shared a portion of a letter he had received from a friend in Philadelphia, this letter referencing the event:

"That you may not suppose the people's love and esteem for this great good man is at all diminished, I will just relate one little incident. On Saturday evening he went to Ricketts' new amphitheatre: it was the first time he had been in public since the late noise and disturbance on account of the treaty – the theatre was very crowded. When the President and Lady came, all was silence; Mrs. Washington came forward to the front of the box, and was seated: the President was a little while engaged in putting off his cloak – as soon as he came forward, an instantaneous loud and general plaudit took place – second – and a third, still loude [sic]: when these were over, an honest sailor, in the sincerity of a generous full heart, called out, 'Damn me if that is enough for the Old Fellow, let's give him three cheers.' In which the whole audience, gentle and simple, old and young, most heartily joined. It must have given the President pleasure: his benign countenance and graceful





*Robert Morris owned the mansion at the corner of Market and Sixth streets in Philadelphia, but he and his wife moved next door to make it available for use as the "President's House." During the years the Washingtons lived there, several additions to the building were constructed to provide living space for a household and office staff of about 30 people. These residents included several enslaved African Americans.*

from William L. Breton c. 1828 lithograph first published in John Fanning Watson's *Annals of Philadelphia*, 1830.

demeanor showed his sensibility and the goodness of his heart. I verily believe he is more sincerely admired and beloved at this moment than he ever was."<sup>17</sup>

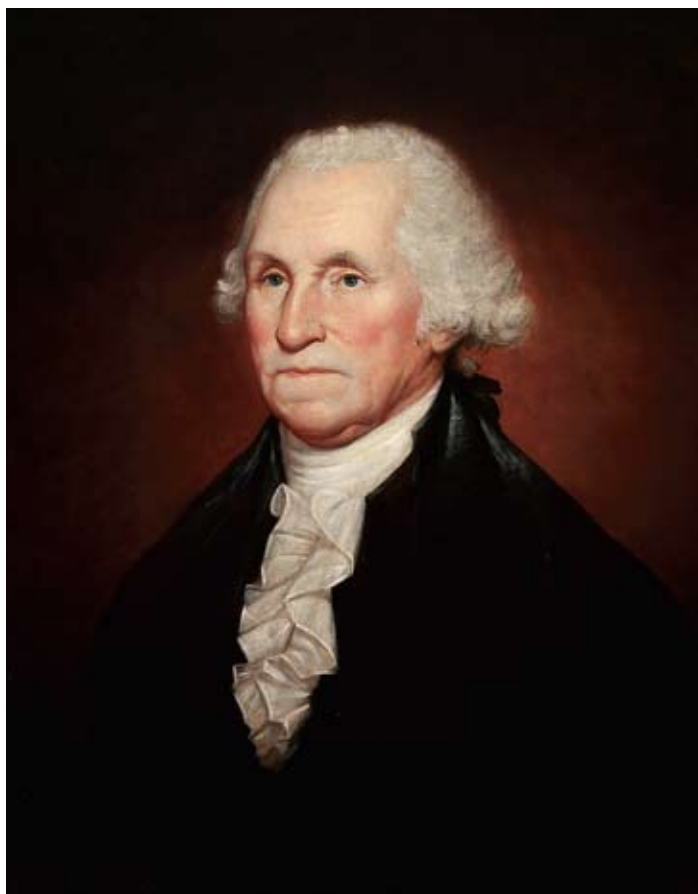
The President was back at Ricketts' Amphitheatre a little over a year later on February 22, 1796 when the building and the adjacent O'Eller's Hotel were the site for a grand ball to celebrate Washington's 65th birthday.<sup>18</sup> An opening was created in the side of the Amphitheatre making it possible for guests to pass directly between the arena and hotel for the program, dinner and dance.<sup>19</sup> Washington wrote in his diary, "Went in the evening to an elegant entertainment given on my birth night."<sup>20</sup> Jacob Hiltzheimer also made note of the celebration in his diary. His entry for February 22 read:

"At noon Speaker Hare, of the Senate, and Speaker Latimer, of the House, with their members, called on President Washington to congratulate him on his

birthday. He stood in the centre of the back room, where he bowed to each member as he passed into the front room, where wine and cake were served. At night the ladies and gentlemen had a dance at Rickett's [sic] riding place, southwest corner of Sixth and Chestnut Streets."<sup>21</sup>

Before leaving office, President Washington once again attended Ricketts' circus, this time on January 24, 1797. A notice in the *Philadelphia Inquirer* on January 23 indicated "a variety of performances at the Pantheon BY DESIRE OF THE PRESIDENT OF THE UNITED STATES" would take place the next day.<sup>22</sup> This message was reinforced by Ricketts' advertisements in both the *Philadelphia Inquirer*<sup>23</sup> and the *Aurora General Advertiser*<sup>24</sup> on January 24. Washington's diary entry for January 24 simply noted that he, "Went to the Pantheon in the evening."<sup>25</sup>

Two days later, Ricketts' reportedly paid \$100 for a 28-



*Seventeen-year-old Rembrandt Peale painted this portrait of the President in 1795. The same year, the first performance at Ricketts' New Amphitheatre took place on October 19. George and Martha Washington attended the circus in its new location very soon thereafter.*

National Portrait Gallery – Smithsonian Institution

year old white horse named Jack, which allegedly had been ridden by General Washington during at least a portion of the War for Independence. The horse was not purchased directly from the President, but rather from Robert Morris (1734-1806) who owned the President's House.<sup>26</sup> The purchase might have been made for the promotional value of the venerable horse.

Washington's final visit to Ricketts' took place on March 4, 1797, the day that John Adams took the oath as the second President of the United States. That evening, a testimonial retirement program for Washington was presented at Ricketts' Amphitheatre (circus performances had ended for the season on February 23).<sup>27</sup>

The association between Ricketts and Washington was apparently one of mutual admiration for each other's horseriding abilities. Not only did the President attend Ricketts' equestrian performances on at least five occasions between April 20, 1793 and January 24, 1797, but Ricketts himself was reported to have praised the President's riding stature. George Washington Parke Custis (1781-1857), Washington's adopted grandson, wrote:

"Ricketts, the celebrated equestrian, used to say, 'I delight to see the general ride, and make it a point to fall in with him when I hear that he is abroad on horseback – his seat is so firm, his management so easy and graceful, that I, who am a professor of horsemanship, would go to him and learn to ride.'"<sup>28</sup>

## Epilogue

On March 9, 1797, Washington left Philadelphia with his family. Six days later he arrived at his home in Virginia just before dinnertime.<sup>29</sup> The "Father of Our Country" died at Mount Vernon on December 14, 1799.

On December 17, 1799, three days after Washington's death, Ricketts' Amphitheatre caught fire and burned to the ground. Ricketts subsequently attempted to reestablish his Philadelphia circus, but he was unsuccessful. Thereafter, he chartered a small ship, "constructed stalls on deck and each horse secured in slings, laid in hay and oats, and took lumber enough to build a circus."<sup>30</sup> He set sail for the West Indies in May of 1800. During the voyage, he was captured by a French privateer and taken to Guadeloupe in the southern Caribbean Islands where his circus assets were publicly sold. Ricketts recovered most of his horses and materials with the help of a local merchant. He was able to produce a circus there and advance with his plan to appear with his show on several other islands. Ricketts apparently returned to the United States where he sold his horses and hired a vessel to take him to England. The ship set sail sometime in 1802, after which it was surmised that it took on water and sank. The man who has been credited with being the "Father of the American Circus" was presumed lost at sea. **BW**

**Note:** *Within the quoted words of this article taken from various printed or hand-written sources, the archaic form of the long s (f) used in the 18<sup>th</sup> century, has been replaced by the modern letterform short, terminal or round s.*

## Endnotes

1. James S. Moy, "John B. Ricketts' Circus 1793-1800," Ph. D. Thesis, University of Illinois, Urbana-Champaign, 1977, p. 8; Illinois State University Milner Library Special Collections.
2. Ibid., p. 10; and *Dunlap's American Daily Advertiser*, April 4, 1793.
3. Ricketts' advertisement, *The Mail or Claypoole's Daily Advertiser*, Philadelphia, April 20, 1793, p. 2.
4. Notice, *Aurora General Advertiser*, Philadelphia, April 20, 1793, p. 3.
5. Ricketts' advertisement, *Aurora General Advertiser*, Philadelphia, April 22, 1793, p. 3.
6. Douglas S. Harvey, *The Theatre of Empire: Frontier Performances in America 1750-1860* (London and New York: Routledge, 2010), p. 103.
7. Ricketts' advertisement, *The Mail or Claypoole's Daily Advertiser*, Philadelphia, April 24, 1793, p. 3; Greg Parkinson newspaper collection.
8. Photograph of a handbill for Ricketts' circus for April 24, 1793; Tom Parkinson papers, Circus World Museum.





This watercolor shows Ricketts' Amphitheatre looking southeast across Chestnut Street in 1797. O'Eller's Hotel is on the right. Sixth Street separates the circus building from the county Court House that also served as Congress Hall from 1790-1800. The President's House was two blocks to the north on the southeast corner of Market and Sixth.

Circus World Museum

9. Joseph E. Fields, editor, "Worthy Partner": *The Papers of Martha Washington* (Westport, Conn: Greenwood Press, 1994), p. 248. Samuel Powell (1738-1793) twice served as Mayor of Philadelphia.
10. Washington was inaugurated as President of the United States on April 30, 1789 in New York City. The following year, he moved into the President's House in Philadelphia, the city having become the temporary federal capital as stipulated by the Residents Act of July 16, 1790.
11. Jacob Hiltzheimer, *Extracts from the Diary of Jacob Hiltzheimer*, edited by Jacob Cox Parsons (Philadelphia: Press of W. F. Fell & Co., 1893), p. 191, entry for April 24, 1793. Parsons was the grandson of one of Hiltzheimer's three daughters, Catherine, and thus he was Hiltzheimer's great grandson.
12. *Ibid.*, p. 192.
13. *Aurora General Advertiser*, op. cit., July 16, 1793, p. 3.
14. James S. Moy, op. cit., p. 92.
15. Charles Durang, "The Philadelphia Stage from the Year 1749 to the Year 1855" cited in James S. Moy, op. cit. p. 53.
16. President Washington spoke to the House and Senate in Congress Hall at noon on December 8, 1795 (see Hiltzheimer, op. cit., p. 223). His visit to the Ricketts' New Amphitheatre is thought to have been prior to that date when he was again seen in public settings.
17. "Extract of a letter from a gentleman in Philadelphia to his friend in Charleston dated January 22," *Pennsylvania Packet*, Philadelphia, March 1, 1796, p. 3.
18. *Federal Gazette and Baltimore Daily Advertiser*, March 1, 1796 per James S. Moy, op. cit., p. 55.
19. *Ibid.*
20. George Washington, *Diaries of George Washington, Volume 6*, entry for February 22, 1799, p. 235; retrieved from the Library of Congress website.
21. Jacob Hiltzheimer, op. cit., page 225.
22. *Philadelphia Inquirer*, January 23, 1797, p. 3.
23. *Ibid.*, p. 2.
24. *Aurora General Advertiser*, Philadelphia, January 24, 1797, p. 2.
25. George Washington, op. cit., p. 232.
26. John Durang, *The Memoir of John Durang, American Actor (1785-1816)*, edited by Alan S. Downer (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1966), p. 46. Robert Morris was one of the Founding Fathers. He was a signer of the Declaration of Independence, and he served in the United States Senate 1789-1795. Morris moved out of the house he owned on the corner of Market and Sixth streets, voluntarily making it available to Washington during the time he served as President.
27. James S. Moy, op. cit., p. 44.
28. George Washington Parke Custis, *Recollections and Private Memoirs of Washington* (New York: Derby & Jackson, 1860), p. 486; retrieved online.
29. George Washington, op. cit., p. 239.
30. John Durang, op. cit., p. 103.

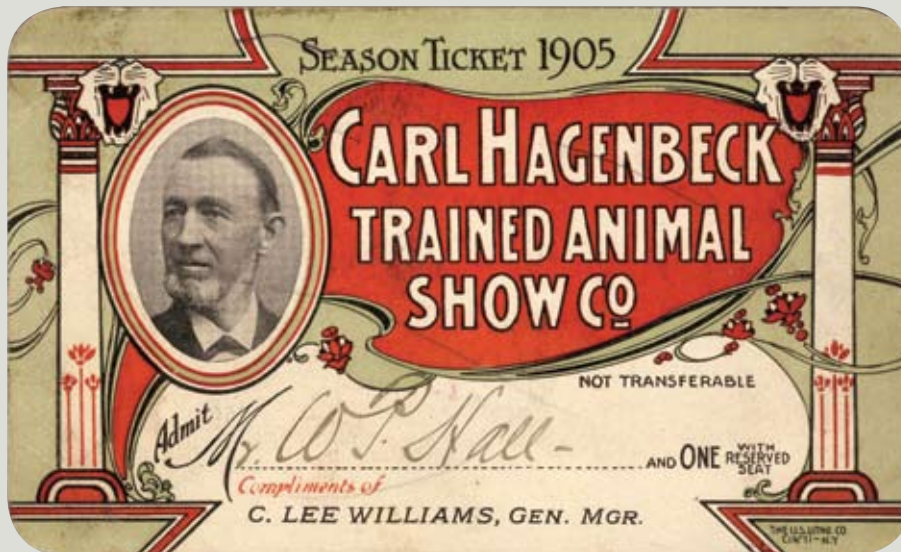
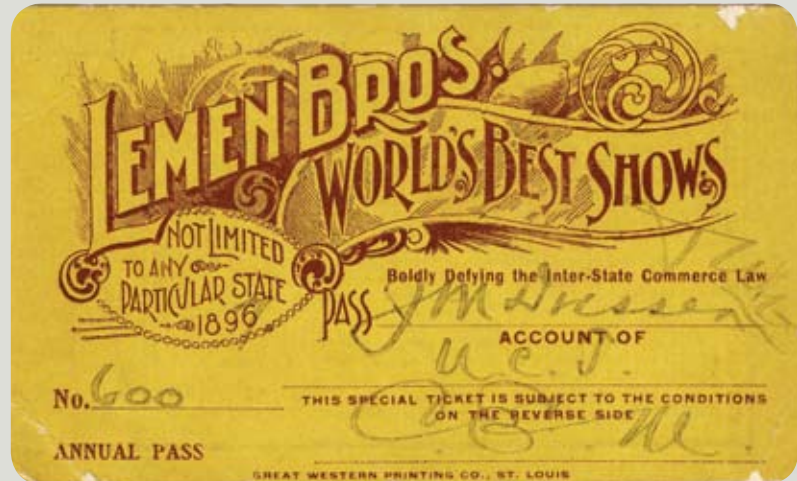


# Passes from the Past

## Circus World Museum's Season Ticket Collection

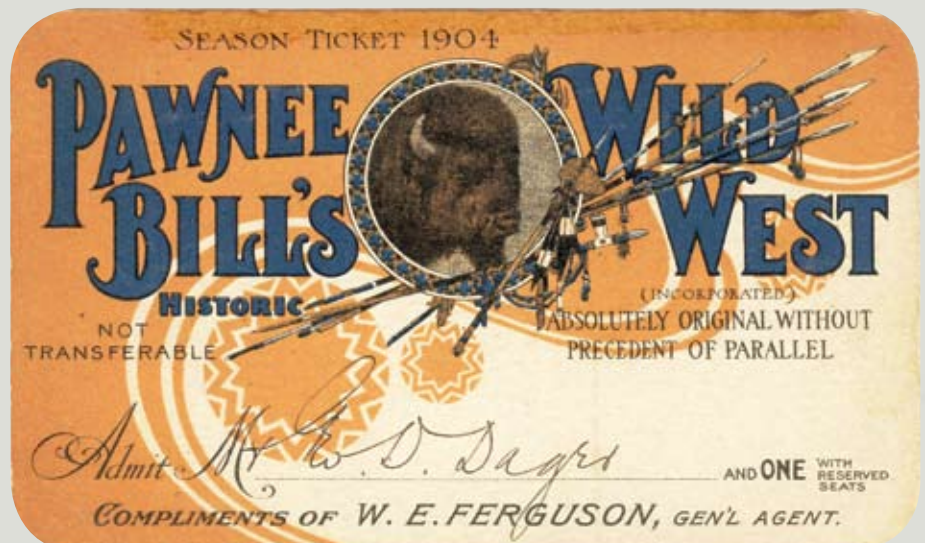
The Robert L. Parkinson Library & Research Center at Circus World Museum preserves several thousand circus tickets of all forms, as well as historic season tickets and lifetime passes. The season tickets on the following pages were selected from this vast collection. We are grateful to Pete Shrake for sharing these with Bandwagon readers. All passes are reproduced at their original size and shape.

Lemen Bros., a show that wintered in Argentine, Kansas, had its annual passes printed by the Great Western Printing Company in St. Louis. Of particular interest is the defiant statement concerning the inter-state commerce law.



The image of the great German animal dealer and zoo innovator appears on this season ticket printed by the U. S. Litho. Co. The title was used from 1903-1906. The circus was the forerunner of Hagenbeck-Wallace, a show that gained great popularity in the early decades of the 20th century. William P. Hall, of course, was one of the most prominent equine and wild animal dealers of the era.

Gordon W. Lillie was the proprietor of Pawnee Bill's Wild West that toured America for 21 years beginning in 1888. This colorful season ticket dates from 1904.







Erie Litho Co. printed this 1904 season ticket. Of special interest is the fact that the great magician and escape artist, Harry Houdini, performed with the Welsh Brothers Circus in 1895 and again in 1898. Adam Forepaugh, Jr. (1861-1919) had once been an elephant trainer, but never held any ownership in a circus.

This circus became legendary for its practice of cutting the performance short whenever weather conditions became threatening, leading to the expression used around other shows, "Give them a John Robinson." John F. Robinson, whose father founded the circus, used this 1901 "Pass for two persons" to cultivate personal and professional associations.



Col. Fred T. Cummins operated his wild west show from 1904 through 1914. In 1906, the show featured the aging Geronimo, the famed Apache leader.

Walter L. Main sustained one of the worst train wrecks in circus history five years before this pass was issued. Six people were killed and most of the show's equipment was destroyed when the engineer lost control as the train was descending a steep grade in Pennsylvania. Note the cut of the pony riding Roman style on two horses.







Campbell Bros. started as a wagon show, later converting to rails. It operated in various seasons between 1896 and 1912. Ed Campbell issued this pass to Hal Silvers, not to be confused with the person of the same name born in 1913 who became tight-wire sensation and show owner, Hubert Castle.

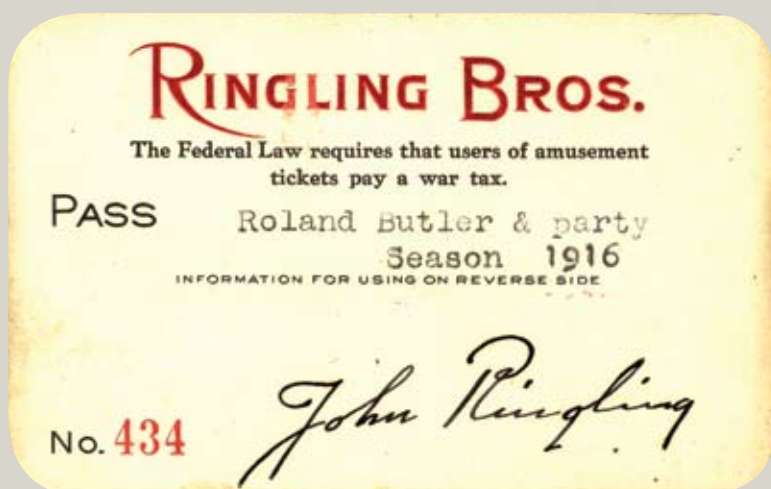
Al F. Wheeler was among Andrew Downie's many partners when they operated Downie & Wheelers from 1911-1913. Downie's next venture was La Tena's wild animal circus, a show he produced by himself.



Ernest Haag operated his Mighty Haag Shows from 1891 until his death in 1935. This season ticket dates from about 1914. The circus began as a wagon show, converted to rails in 1910, and later had the distinction of moving from town to town by motorized trucks. The famous 20th century trumpet-playing bandleader, Harry James, grew up on Mighty Haag. His father led the band and his mother was an acrobat.



La Tena's operated for four seasons beginning in 1914. It was a 10 to 15-car railroad enterprise. This annual pass was for the show's second season. La Tena's proprietor was Andrew Downie who had named the circus after his wife, Millie La Tena.



When John Ringling authorized this season pass, Roland Butler was a young newspaperman in Boston. He joined the Ringling organization in 1923 and went on to become one of the greatest of all circus press agents, promoting the likes of the Wallendas, the Ubangis and Gargantua the Great.

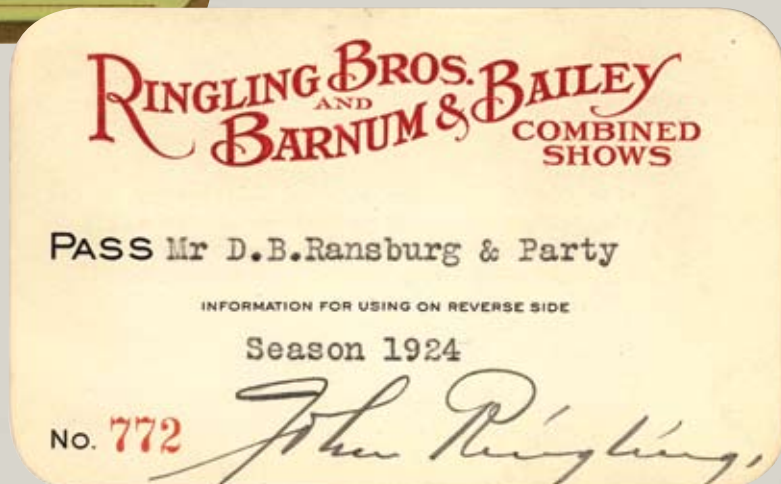
Charles and Clifton Sparks operated their show for 26 seasons. The American Circus Corporation bought Sparks Circus and operated it in 1929 before it was sold to Ringling along with the other Corporation shows.





Some show owners like Pete and Gus Sun used the same artwork on their tickets and passes as they did on their route cards and letterheads. This pass was for the last year of their circus that operated from 1892 through 1918.

Ringling Bros. and Barnum & Bailey was a show of unprecedented size when this pass was in use. Charles and John Ringling were the only brothers still living at the time.



Al. G. Barnes always emphasized wild animal acts in the show he directed from 1906-1927. The American Circus Corporation purchased his California-based rail show in 1928.

The Miller brothers operated a huge cattle ranch on 110,000 acres near Ponca City in the Indian Territory of Oklahoma. Impressed by the success of their neighbor Gordon Lillie and his Pawnee Bill's Wild West, they started their own wild west show named after their ranch. Karl Knecht had helped to launch the Circus Fans Association the year before this pass was issued.



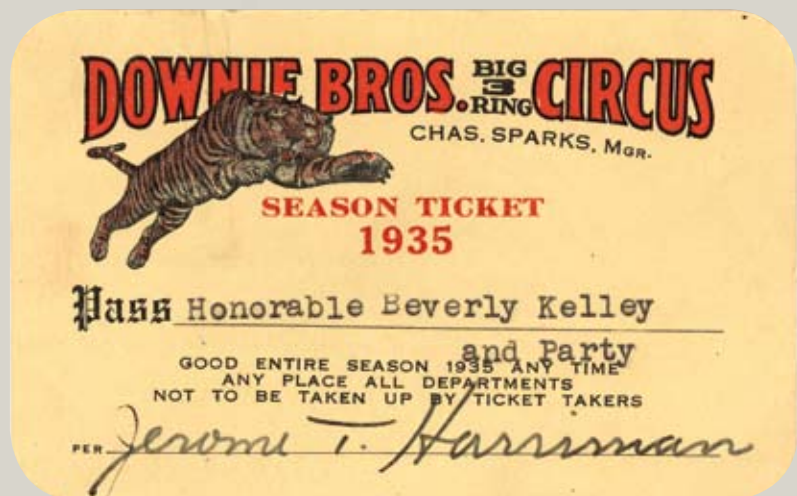


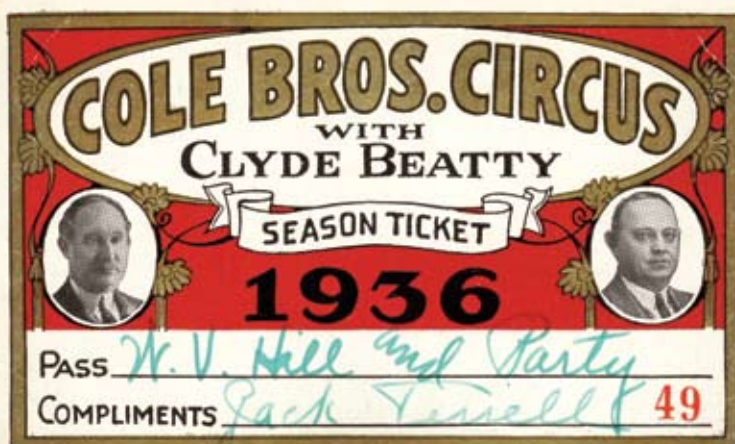
Floyd King earned a college degree, but he opted for a career in show business. With his brother, Howard King, they operated the Gentry Bros. Circus from 1926 through 1929. Floyd particularly had a long and storied circus career.



Buck Jones Wildwest Shows & Round-Up Days operated for a single season, with the star of the silver screen as its principal feature. The show folded due to the failing economy of late 1929.

Andrew Downie framed a truck circus in 1926, later selling it to Charles Sparks. Sparks was the proprietor from 1930-1938. Jerome Harriman was the general agent in charge of the show's advance. Bev Kelley was serving as a press agent for Ringling, the circus he began promoting in 1930.





Jess Adkins and Zack Terrell joined forces with the incomparable wild animal trainer Clyde Beatty in 1935 and put out a major new circus. The Cole Bros. railroad show continued to operate under various proprietors through the 1952 season.

Adkins and Terrell launched a second rail unit in 1938, reviving Fred Buchanan's Robbins Bros. title. The circus featured cowboy movie star Hoot Gibson.



Col. Tim McCoy attained stardom in western films in the 1920s and 1930s, and was featured on Ringling-Barnum beginning in 1936. He began his own wild west show in 1938, but it was forced into bankruptcy only a few weeks after it opened.





THE GREATEST SHOW ON EARTH

PASS

UPON PAYMENT OF TAXES AND SERVICE CHARGES, IF ANY

SEASON 1953

After John Ringling North took control of Ringling Bros. and Barnum & Bailey in 1938, he asked his friend Charles Baskerville to design a new logo for the circus. The result was this Baskerville artwork that was used by the show for more than 50 years.

Al G. Kelly & Miller Bros. began in 1937. In 1954, all three of its founders - Obert, Dorey and Kelly Miller - were still operating the motorized circus that always boasted a spectacular array of wild and exotic animals in its menagerie and performance.

"NOTHING TOO GOOD FOR OUR FRIENDS"  
ANNUAL PASS ★ SEASON 1954



Please Honor F. BEVERLY KELLY PARTY  
Signed R. O. Scatterday

1956 ANNUAL PASS



George Werner

No.

1

ISSUED TO  
Frank McClosky  
SIGNED

Poor business forced Clyde Beatty Circus to close on May 9, 1956. However, Frank McClosky and Walter Kernan purchased and reopened the show in August. McClosky, Lillian Leitzel's one-time personal rigger, had been General Manager of Ringling-Barnum in 1952 and 1953. It is interesting that this No. 1 pass was issued by McClosky to George Werner, a veteran Ringling canvas boss and Beatty lot superintendent.

Clifford Vargas was a hands-on circus owner who was dedicated to the traditions of the big top. He purchased the Miller-Johnson Circus in 1972 and gave it the new title bearing his name.



This annual pass is not transferable and must be presented only by person to whom issued. Present at Main Circus Entrance for your required reserved section checks prior to performance attending.

ISSUED TO

CLIFF VARGAS  
President



# An Early Menagerie Lease

These articles of agreement made and concluded this nineteenth day of April eighteen hundred and thirty two between Joseph Strang & Co of the first part and Harrison Hopkins & Co of the second part

Witnesseth that J Joseph Strang & Co have this day agreed and by these presents do agree to hire rent or lease unto the said Hopkins & Co of the second part the caravan of living animals now in the charge of the said Strang consisting of a Lyoness, Leopard, Cougar and other animals now in Tuscaloosa with the Horse Waggons Carriage and all other apparatus and fixtures now with said caravan for the term or term of the three months from the date of these presents for the sum of thirteen hundred and fifty dollars to be paid to the party of the first part at the expiration of the aforesaid three months

And J the said Hopkins & Co of the second part have this day hired rent or leased of the said Strang & Co the aforesaid animals apparatus and other fixtures now belonging to said caravan as mentioned for the time aforesaid and do agree for the sum of thirteen hundred and fifty dollars to be paid by the party of the second part to the said Strang & Co at the expiration of the aforesaid time and to the said Hopkins & Co do further agree to defray all and every expense that shall arise or accrue to the said caravan during the aforesaid time and it is further agreed by the party of the second part that the said caravan and fixtures at the expiration of the aforesaid three months - provided the party of the

second part do not wish to continue the contract one month longer at the same price and conditions as aforesaid for month that is to say four hundred and fifty dollars in which case the animals shall be delivered at the end of the last mentioned month and the said Hopkins & Co do further agree that the said Strang or any person authorized by him shall or may come and continue with said caravan as during during the time last mentioned and that the expenses of the said Strang or person shall be defrayed by the said Hopkins & Co during the time of one month and the said party of the second part doth agree to deliver to the said Strang & Co all the aforesaid animals that shall be alive at the expiration of term within one hundred miles of the caravan of animals now in charge of the said Hopkins consisting of Jaffer Sultan & Co

And it is further agreed on the part of the first party that in case any horse or horses shall die or be injured and adjudged unable to recover so as to do duty in said caravan or fixtures on said horse shall be filled by the said Hopkins at the expense of the said Strang & Co and to be deducted from the monies agreed to be paid for the use of the said animals

For the fulfilling of the above articles we hereunto set our hands and seals the date above written in presence of

Spencer Sellers Joseph Strang & Co  
Harrison Hopkins & Co

It is further agreed in addition to the above articles that the said Strang shall have the privilege of continuing with the above mentioned animals during the time specified or may send any person to the same at the expense of the party of the second part in case Mr. Sellers leaves the said animals and it is further agreed that the said Hopkins & Co shall pay the monies and to no other person. This article to have the same force as if embodied in the above articles. For the fulfilling of the same we hereunto set our hands and seals this 16 day of April 1832

Spencer Sellers Joseph Strang & Co  
Harrison Hopkins & Co

The original of this 1832 menagerie lease is at Circus World Museum.

by Pete Shrake

So often it seems we have only snippets of the past, especially of circuses and menageries of early 19<sup>th</sup> century America. Much of what we know is from newspaper advertisements and handbills, but on occasion other documents surface sometimes seemingly out of the blue. In the fall of 2015, staff at the Robert L. Parkinson Library & Research Center at Circus World Museum received a call from an individual in New York State asking if there would be interest in an old document he had found. It had been discovered amid a stack of old papers in a box he had picked up at an antique show. The document proved to be an 1832 lease for a menagerie in storage in Tuscaloosa, then the capitol of Alabama. In the agreement, Harrison Hopkins and Company

agreed to lease a menagerie from its owner Joseph Strang and Company for three months with options to renew for a total cost of \$1,350 for the term of the lease. An equivalent value today would be approximately \$37,000.<sup>1</sup> The lease identifies the menagerie as the Caravan of Living Animals, which may have been the Grand Caravan of Living Animals formed in 1822. This menagerie possessed a variety of animals including a "lioness," cougars, leopards, and the elephant Tippoo Sultan.<sup>2</sup>

Tracing the history of this menagerie is difficult. Nothing is known of the signatories in the years leading up to the agreement. A review of newspapers from Alabama, Mississippi, Arkansas, Georgia and Louisiana, showed a regrettable



# GRAND CARAVAN



To be seen at Huntsville for a few days, to  
commence on **WEDN - SDAY** the  
20th of April, 1831.

## A full grown LION & LIONESS

The Arabian CAMEL, lately imported from the  
Coast of Barbary.

A pair of full grown OSTRICHES, male and fe-  
male; just imported from Africa.

A pair of South American PANTHERS, male  
and female; both in one cage.

A spotted TYGER from Brazil.

A full grown African LEOPARD, lately imported.

The North American PANTHERS, male and fe-  
male; taken in Kentucky.

The Shetland PONEY, rode by Capt. Bell, who  
will perform many diverting tricks; besides a whole  
wilderness of the Baboon and Monkey race. All of  
which are interesting to the admirers of natural  
history.

No apprehension of danger need be entertain-  
ed, as they are secured in substantial iron cages.  
Ladies and Gentlemen may visit the exhibition with  
safety, as the owners accompany the Exhibition  
themselves, and will give every attention to specta-  
tors. Hours of admission from 11 A. M. to 4 P.  
M. and from 6 to 9 P. M. Admission 50 Cents;  
Children under 12 years old, and persons of colour,  
half price.

April 13, 1831.

One of the few advertisements found for menageries in the south in the years leading up to the signing of the lease was this one for a "Grand Caravan" that appeared in *The Democrat*, a Huntsville, Alabama newspaper, in the spring of 1831.

lack of advertisements for menageries during this period. In fact, only two were found. One ad announced a "Grand Caravan" was to show at Huntsville, Alabama in April 1831. This show featured a variety of animals including a lioness and a leopard, all of which are mentioned in the lease.

Tracing the history of Tippoo Sultan offers more clues. The elephant was a star attraction and a veteran of the menagerie circuit by the time the lease was negotiated. An Asiatic male elephant, Tippoo Sultan arrived in the United States in June 1821 on board the ship *Bengal*. His owners named him after the Sultan of Mysore who was killed while defending his capital Seringapatam from an attack by the British Army in 1799.<sup>3</sup> The elephant appeared as a part of Joseph Martin's menagerie in 1822 and from then on was quite a headliner. Circus historian Stuart Thayer noted, "The concern, anchored by the elephant, existed until 1834" which suggests the lease may have been a later incarnation of Martin's 1822 menagerie.<sup>4</sup>

In 1826, Martin partnered with Edward Finch to form Martin, Finch & Co.<sup>5</sup> The next year a description of the show, minus the elephant, appeared in *The Evening Post* (a New York newspaper) when it was in the Bowery. This description noted that for 25 cents one could see almost 100 animals.

"Gentlemen wishing to visit the exhibition with their families, will be waited upon with a performance of the several animals, at any time between the hours of 10 in the morning and 9 in the evening. The Lions, tigers, Panthers, and all the ferocious animals, will receive their meat in the presence of the spectators every evening at 8 o'clock precisely. The animals are all perfectly secured, so that all visitors cannot apprehend the least danger."<sup>6</sup>

In addition to its exotic name, the performing qualities of the elephant also certainly commanded attention. On October 22, 1830, *The North Carolina Spectator* ran an advertisement for the menagerie that provided details about Tippoo Sultan who now performed with a new keeper "The celebrated Mr. Stoker."

"Among the variety of singular marks of sagacity in this Elephant, is the fact that he will take his stand in the middle of the yard, and move briskly around; his hind feet remaining in the centre of the circle, which he performs with his head, places his keeper on his tusks, and whilst he continues moving round the circle, tosses him [the keeper] up to the height of 12 or 14 feet, and with the most singular and seemingly studied accuracy, catches him upon his tusks and trunk, and in conclusion, gives him a toss in the air and safely lands him upon the back of the elephant."<sup>7</sup>

Given that performance, it is not a surprise that Hop-





An unknown artist created this view of the interior of a c. 1820 menagerie. Spectators viewed three multi-compartment cage wagons (the tops of the wheels of each wagon can be seen just behind the waist high barrier wall) that were protected from the elements by a weather beaten canvas tent.

State Library, New South Wales, Image number ML 1354

kins would want to lease the show. By the time Hopkins leased the menagerie, it is possible that another person was in charge of the animal, perhaps the man named Hastra mentioned in the lease.

A second advertisement in *Western Carolinian* noted that the *Grand Menagerie of Curious Animals* contained a "Brazilian Tiger, the Ichneuman, the leopard, the Catamonda; with various kinds of monkeys among which are the lion tail monkey; the ring tail monkey; together with several Apes and Baboons." The menagerie also included a "Dandy Jack" a type of act that included a monkey riding on a pony.<sup>8</sup> By December 1830, the "Grand Menagerie" with Tippoo Sultan was in Charleston, South Carolina and remained in the south travelling through Tallahassee in February 1831.<sup>9</sup>

The agreement between Strang and Hopkins was only for three months, but Stuart Thayer in his study of menageries suggests that Hopkins and Co. may have continued the

lease for at least two years.<sup>10</sup> Once the agreement concluded, Hopkins went on to other menagerie and circus business ventures collaborating with Henry Rockwell and Mathew Buckley in 1838 to form the Mamouth Arena Circus.<sup>11</sup> Several years later, in the spring of 1843, Hopkins again appeared on the record in an ad in *The Baltimore Sun*. This time Hopkins was directing the Philadelphia Zoological Garden United with the New York Institute. The show was a grand affair of 25 wagons ornately painted, a band, and John Schaffer, a "celebrated" lion tamer. During the performance Schaffer would, as the ad noted, "harness and drive a lion before an ancient Triumphal Car, going with a terrific flight across a railway of 100 feet in length, to the great astonishment of all."<sup>12</sup> Another ad, for a show in Gettysburg, likened the menagerie with its lion act to "the eighth wonder of the world."<sup>13</sup>

Yet there is still much we do not know. There is no re-





cord of Hopkins's activities after 1843 nor does there appear to be any record of Joseph Strang either before or after the signing of the lease. A signature for a Joseph Strong or Strang does appear on the Articles of Association of the Zoological Institute signed at Somers, New York in 1835, but it is not clear if this is the same person or not.<sup>14</sup> Even the fate of the elephant is not positively known. The caravan, including Tippoo Sultan, was one of a number of menageries that formed the Zoological Institute when it organized in 1835.<sup>15</sup> In the mid-1830s, the elephant was transported to the Caribbean where it was later reported to have died while bathing in a pond.<sup>16</sup>

How the menagerie lease ended up in a flea market in upstate New York is equally a mystery. That this document survives is an illustration that fragments of the historical record still surface, sometimes in unexpected places. It also represents a paradox so commonly encountered when studying the past. As every new piece of evidence comes to the surface, it fills a gap in the record, but in doing so often also leads to more questions. **BW**

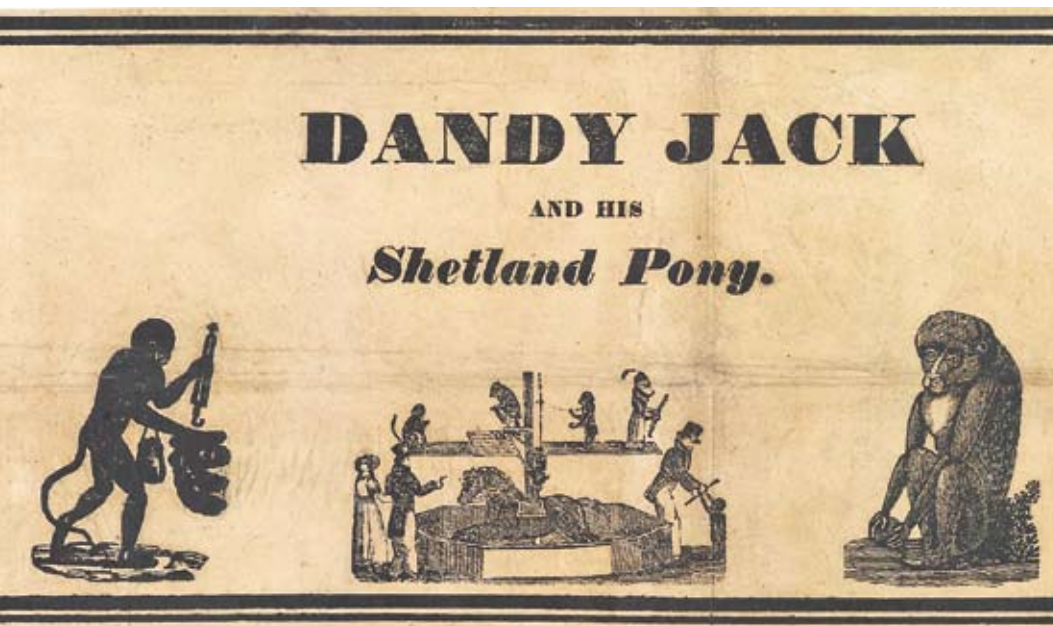
## Transcribed Document

These articles of Agreement made and concluded this sixteenth day of April Eighteen hundred and thirty two between Joseph Strang & Co. of the first part and Harrison Hopkins & Co. of the second part.

Witnesseth that I Joseph Strang & Co have this day agreed and by these presents do agree to hire rent or lease onto the said Hopkins & Co of the second part the Caravan of Living Animals now in the charge of the said Strong consisting of a Lyoness leopard cougar and other animals now in Tuscaloosa with the horses Wagons Canvas and all other apparatus and [fixtures] now with said Caravan for the term or time of three months from the date of these presents for the sum of thirteen hundred and fifty dollars to be paid to the party of the first part at the Expiration of the aforesaid three months.

And I the said Hopkins & Co of the second part have this day hired rented or leased the said Strang & Co the aforesaid Animals apparatus and all fixtures now belonging to said Caravan afore mentioned for the time [afore] said for the sum of thirteen hundred and fifty dollars to be paid by the party of the second part to the said Strang & Co. at the expiration of the afore said time and I the said Hopkins & Co. do further agree to defray all and every expense that shall arise or accrue to the said Caravan during the afore said time and it is further agreed by the party of the second part that they will deliver to the party of the first part the said Caravan and fixtures at the Expiration of the aforesaid three months provided the party of the second part do not wish to continue the contract one month longer at the same price and conditions as afore mentioned per month this is to say four hundred and fifty dollars in which case the ani-

mals shall be delivered at the end of the last mentioned month and the said Hopkins & Co. do further agree that the said Strong or any person authorized by him shall or may come and continue with said animals during the time last mentioned and the expenses of the said Strang or person shall be defrayed by the said Hopkins & Co during the time of one month and the said party of the second part do agree to deliver to the said Strang & Co all the afore mentioned animals that shall be alive at the expiration of time within one hundred miles of the caravan of animals now in charge of the said Hopkins consisting of Tippoo Sultan. And it is further agreed that the part of the first part that in case any horse or horses shall die or be injured and [illegible] unable to recover so as to do



Detail of an 1832 menagerie poster highlighting a "Dandy Jack" act.

Circus World Museum



duty to said caravan or failure in said horse shall be filled by the said Hopkins at the expense of the said Strang & Co and to be deducted from the monies agreed to be paid for the use of said animals.

For the fulfilling of the above mentioned articles we hereunto set our hands and seals to the date above written in presence of

Spencer Gregory      Joseph Strang & Co      {LS}  
Harrison Hopkins & Co      {LS}

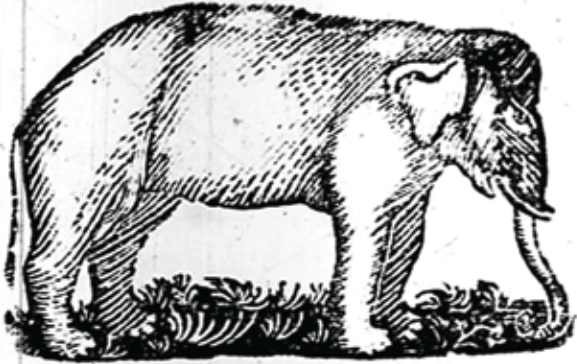
It is further agreed in addition to the above articles that the said Strang shall have the privilege of continuing with the above mentioned animals during the term specified or may authorize any person to do the same at the expense of the party of the second part in case Mr. Hastra Leaves the said animals and it is further agreed that the said Hopkins & Co shall pay the money for the use of the said animals to the said Strang or to his order and to no other person. This article to have the same force as if embodied in the above articles for the fulfilling of the same are presents set our hands and seals this 16<sup>th</sup> day of April 1832.

In presence of

Spencer Gregory      Joseph Strang & Co      {LS}  
Harrison Hopkins & CO      {LS}

### Endnotes

1. Contemporary dollar values were tabulated via an inflation calculator found at: <http://www.in2013dollars.com/1800-dollars-to-2016-dollars>.
2. Several spelling variations of the elephant's name exists. For the purposes of this article, I have elected to follow the spelling found in the 1832 lease and in an 1834 newspaper advertisement.
3. Charles W. "Chang" Reynolds Papers 1933-1986, Robert L. Parkinson Library & Research Center, Circus World Museum.
4. Stuart Thayer, "A History of the Traveling Menagerie," *American Circus Anthology, Essays of the Early Years*, arranged and edited by William L. Slout. 2005.
5. *The Evening Post* (New York, New York), March 13, 1826.
6. Stuart Thayer refers to the Martin, Finch lease in Stuart Thayer, "Tippo Sultan: The Man and the Beast," *American Circus Anthology, Essays of the Early Years*, op. cit. The quote detailing the menagerie can be found in *The Evening Post* (New York, New York), Feb. 14, 1827. Martin is listed as Tippoos Sultan's keeper in an advertisement in *The Evening Post* (New York, New York), March 13, 1826.
7. *North Carolina Spectator and Western Advertiser* (Rutherfordton, North Carolina), Oct. 22, 1830.
8. *Western Carolinian* (Salisbury, North Carolina), June 15, 1830.
9. Charles W. "Chang" Reynolds Papers 1933-1986, op. cit.
10. Thayer, "Tippo Sultan: The Man and the Beast," op. cit.
11. Stuart Thayer, *Annals of the American Circus* (Seattle: Dauven and Thayer, 2000), p. 148; A brief biography of Hopkins can be found in William L. Slout, *Olympians of the Sawdust Circle* (San Bernadino: The Borgo Press, 1998), p. 113.
12. *The Sun* (Baltimore, Maryland), April 27, 1843. A second advertisement mentioning Hopkins also appeared in *The Sun*, May 4, 1843.
13. *The Gettysburg Compiler*, May 22, 1843 announced a show run by "Messrs H. Hopkins & Co."
14. Articles of Association of the Zoological Institute, Somers, New York, January 14, 1835, photocopy at Robert L. Parkinson Library & Research Center, Circus World Museum.
15. Stuart Thayer, "A History of the Traveling Menagerie," op. cit.
16. John A. Dingess, unpublished untitled manuscript, Robert L. Parkinson Library & Research Center, p. 80; Stuart Thayer, "Tippo Sultan: The Man and the Beast," op. cit.



**GRAND MENAGERIE.  
OF LIVING  
ANIMALS.**

To be exhibited at Lincolnton, on Tuesday and Wednesday, the 26th, 27th, inst. for two days only, among which are the

**TIPPOO SULTAN,**  
*The great Hunting Elephant.*

**DESCRIPTION AND PERFORMANCES.**

Among the variety of singular marks of sagacity in this Elephant, he takes a stand in the middle of the yard, and moves briskly round; his hind feet remaining in the centre, forming a circle with his head, places his keeper on his tusks, and in continued repetition round the circle, tosses him up to the height of 12 or 14 feet, and with the most singular and seemingly studied accuracy, catches him upon his tusks and trunk, and in conclusion gives him a toss in the air, and safely lodges him upon the back of the Elephant.

The nature of the circumstance, and want of security to the keeper, render this exploit both more dangerous and intrepid than the laughable feats of the celebrated Mr. Stoker. This elephant is a male, and superior in size to any in this country, being about ten feet high, and weighing ten thousand pounds, and has tusks about four feet long.

**THE BRAZILIAN TIGER.**

**AND**  
*Dandy Jack on his pony.*

The exhibition will be accompanied with Good Music.

Admittance 25 cents—children under 12 years of age half price.

This advertisement for the Grand Menagerie of Living Animals appeared in the North Carolina Spectator and Western Advertiser. This may have been the menagerie that ended up in storage in Tuscaloosa and later was leased to Harrison Hopkins.



# The passing of two former CHS presidents

The Circus Historical Society extends its sympathy to the friends and family of two of the organization's former Presidents who passed away in late 2019.

**Judy Griffin** came to the Circus Historical Society through her interest in genealogy after learning that she was a descendent of James L. Hutchinson, an early partner of P. T. Barnum and James A. Bailey. A voracious researcher of circus and genealogical history, Judy served as president from 2010 until 2013, only the second woman to serve in that capacity. Judy was also responsible for creating the first website for the Circus Historical Society. Judy was a retired teacher and past-president of the Autism Society of Wisconsin. She died in Appleton, Wisconsin on November 21, 2019 at the age of 82.



**Robert Sabia**, who was president of the Circus Historical Society from 2006 to 2009, died November 30, 2019 in Bradenton, Florida at the age of 82. Robert was a Connecticut native who was a lifelong circus fan and supporter of circus history. An attorney by education, Robert spent most of his adult life in international business where he developed telecommunication systems in Europe, the Middle East, Asia and South America. His career also took him to the west coast of the United States where he managed construction businesses and to the east coast where he was responsible for mass transit systems. Although Robert's professional career was rich and diverse, he never lost a passion for the circus, and was a member of the Circus Historical Society for more than 50 years.



from CB

## Bandwagon mail option

All copies of *Bandwagon* are mailed at periodical rate, but a few members have experienced delays in receiving their magazine. In December, some post offices apparently set the magazine aside, incorrectly treating it as 4<sup>th</sup> class mail. To overcome this, an option is being offered to use first class. The add-on price will be \$15.00 for 2020 (3 issues). To try this option, send your name, address and payment to:

Circus Historical Society  
PO Box 220643  
Dorchester MA 02122

After the end of the year, we will evaluate this program based on the feedback received.

## Don't miss the next issue of Bandwagon!

The deadline for the Circus Historical Society's 2020 dues payment has now passed; however, *there is still time to renew a membership.*

For those who have not renewed, you can do so at [circushistory.org](http://circushistory.org) or send payment to:

Kristen Lee, Secretary-Treasurer  
Circus Historical Society  
P.O. Box 220643  
Dorchester MA 02122

Payments received before April 30 will assure that your membership does not lapse and that you will receive all four issues of *Bandwagon* this year.

Membership rates are shown on page 3 of this issue.





# Bandwagon Advertising Rates

*Reach those really  
interested in circus history  
with your message.*

Inside of back cover

– \$300

Full page – \$250

Half page – \$150

Quarter page – \$ 85



Please note that the front and back covers plus the inside front cover are not available.

## CIRCUS WORLD REUNION III

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**DINNER & CIRCUS SHOW**

**GUEST SPEAKERS & FORUMS**

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**HOME MOVIES**

**CIRCUS WORLD MEMORABILIA & DISPLAYS**

**CIRCUS AUCTION & RAFFLE**

**+ EPCOT CIRCUS REUNION GET-TOGETHER**

**AND**

**A FOUR HOUR**

**BIRTHDAY PARTY FOR**

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**HOLIDAY INN RESORT ORLANDO - LAKE BUENA VISTA**

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